NATION

SC asks Mamata to clear 25% DA dues to staffers

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Singtel offloads 1.2% stake in Airtel for ₹124.95 crore

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

RCB vs KKR: Virat's outing in focus as IPL resumes

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 17 MAY 2025 | SATURDAY | BENGALURU | 18 DHU'L-QI'DAH, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 133 | Pages: 8

'IMF MUST RETHINK HELPING PAK'

Defence Minister says Pak will use $1 billion funding to finance terror; India kills 6 terrorists in 3 days

AWANTIPORA, 16 MAY

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh called on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reconsider its $1-billion assistance to Pakistan.

"I believe that in today's time, any kind of financial assistance to Pakistan is nothing less than terror funding. India would like the IMF to reconsider its assistance of one billion dollars to Pakistan and refrain from giving any kind of assistance in future," he said.

Singh said Pakistan has again started rebuilding the destroyed terror infrastructure, and its government has collected taxes from the common Pakistani citizens to give it to Masood Azhar, the head of Jaish-e-Mohammed and a UN-designated terrorist.

"The mask of the state and non-state actors has now been completely removed. If nuclear bombs are kept there, then the possibility of them falling into the hands of terrorist elements cannot be ruled out," he said.

With the pause in the military action, India has put Pakistan on "probation, he said.

"A troublemaker is put on probation by the magistrate for some time. If that person does any mischief during the probation, he is given appropriate punishment," Singh said. "Similarly, in the current ceasefire, we have put Pakistan on probation. If its behaviour improves, then it is fine, but if its behaviour deteriorates again, it will be given the harshest punishment".

Meanwhile, six terrorists were killed in the last three days in operations in south Kashmir, officials said on Friday.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh interacts with armed forces personnel at the Bhuj air force station, in Kachchh, Gujarat on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

> **A troublemaker is put on probation by the magistrate for good behaviour for some time. If that person does any mischief during the probation, he is given appropriate punishment**
>
> —Rajnath Singh, Defence Minister

The encounters took place in the Keller area of Shopian and Nadar area of Tral in Pulwama on Tuesday and Thursday, respectively. Three terrorists each were killed in the two operations.

The IGP was addressing a press conference with General Officer Commanding, Victor Force, Major General Dhananjay Joshi and CRPF Inspector General Mitesh Jain at the headquarters of the Victor Force here in south Kashmir's Pulwama district.

"The terrorists took positions in different houses and fired at us. Our challenge was the safe evacuation of the innocent civilians, including children. Then, systematically, searches were conducted one by one in the houses and three terrorists neutralised at separate places," Major Joshi added. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Pak Foreign Minister calls for 'composite dialogue' with India

ISLAMABAD, 16 MAY

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar called for a "composite dialogue" with India to address the contentious issues between the two sides.

India made it clear that it will only have a dialogue with Pakistan on the return of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and the issue of terrorism.

Addressing the Senate on Thursday, Dar said the "ceasefire" with India has been extended till 18 May, but a political dialogue will ultimately have to take place to resolve the problems.

"We have told the world that we will hold a composite dialogue," Dar, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, said.

He also said that the Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMOs) of Pakistan and India would contact each other again on 18 May.

The composite dialogue was launched in 2003 when General Pervez Musharraf was ruling Pakistan. It had eight baskets of components, containing all contentious issues between the two countries. The dialogue was derailed after the 2008 Mumbai attacks and not restored in proper form.

Dar also reiterated that any attempt to block Pakistan's water through the unlawful suspension of the Indus Water Treaty would be treated as "an act of war".

Also on Thursday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif extended an offer of talks to India, saying Pakistan is ready to engage "for peace".

ISRAEL DEF MINISTRY AFFIRMS SUPPORT

Director General of Israel Ministry of Defence Major General (Res) Amir Baram on Thursday spoke with Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and affirmed Israel's support to India's Operation Sindoor. As per Ministry of Defence, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepen bilateral defence cooperation. In a post on X, the MoD said, "DG, Israel Ministry of Defence Maj Gen (Res) Amir Baram today spoke with Defence Secretary Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh, extending Israel's full support to India's rightful fight against terrorism while lauding the success of Operation Sindoor. Both sides reaffirmed

US CHANGES TUNE, BATS FOR DIRECT TALKS

The US wants to encourage and see "direct" talks between India and Pakistan, the State Department has said, a reversal from President Donald Trump's earlier comment that he will work with the two countries for a "solution" on Kashmir. "We want to encourage and see direct talks between the parties. We have been clear on that," State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Tommy Pigott said. Meanwhile, returning to Washington from his Gulf trip, Trump said "What happened with India and Pakistan was a big success. The anger between the two was not a good thing".

Turkish aviation firm moves HC for security clearance

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Turkish company Celebi Airport Services India Pvt Ltd on Friday moved the Delhi High Court agianst the decision of aviation watchdog BCAS revoking its security clearance in the "interest of national security".

The security clearance of the firm was revoked days after Turkey backed Pakistan and condemned India's strikes on terror camps in the neighbouring country.

A lawyer associated with the case confirmed the filing and the plea is likely to be listed next week.

Celebi, operating in the Indian aviation sector for over 15 years and employing over 10,000 people, offers its services at nine airports.

Celebi handles around 58,000 flights and 5,40,00 tonne of cargo annually in India, according to its website. It is currently at Mumbai, Delhi, Cochin, Kannur, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Goa, Ahmedabad and Chennai airports.

It rejected all allegations regarding the company's ownership and operations in India and reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to the country's aviation sector. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Only 31% pass rate in State 2nd PUC exams

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The Karnataka School Examination and Assessment Board (KSEAB) has revealed the results for the Second PUC Exam-2, recording a pass rate of 31.27 per cent. Out of the 194,077 students who sat the exam, 60,692 achieved passing marks. KSEAB has scheduled a third and final round of exams, Exam-3, from 9 to 20 June. Remedial coaching will be available, with no fees for failed candidates. However, improvement and private candidates will incur charges. The Education Department urges students and parents to take this final opportunity seriously to prevent further academic delays.

—Salar news

>>>More on Page 2

Rushdie's attacker gets 25 years in prison

MAYVILLE, 16 MAY

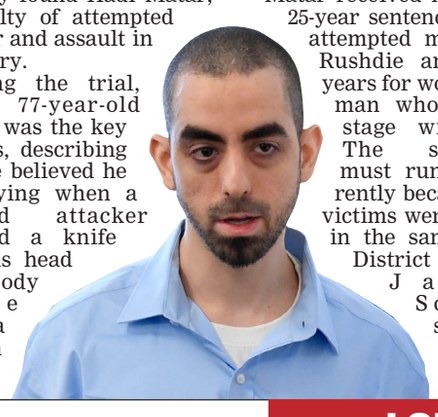
The man convicted of stabbing Salman Rushdie on a New York lecture stage in 2022, leaving the prizewinning author blind in one eye, was sentenced Friday to serve 25 years in prison.

A jury found Hadi Matar, 27, guilty of attempted murder and assault in February.

During the trial, the 77-year-old author was the key witness, describing how he believed he was dying when a masked attacker plunged a knife into his head and body more than a dozen times as he was being introduced at the Chautauqua Institution to speak about writer safety.

Before being sentenced, Matar stood and made a statement about freedom of speech in which he called Rushdie a hypocrite.

Matar received maximum 25-year sentence for the attempted murder of Rushdie and seven years for wounding a man who was on stage with him. The sentences must run concurrently because both victims were injured in the same event, District Attorney Jason Schmidt said. *—PTI*



India sending diplomats to expose Pakistan

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

As part of a major diplomatic offensive, the government will send several all-party delegations to different countries, starting next week, to expose Pakistan-sponsored terrorism on the world forum.

While there was no clarity on the exact number of delegations or their members, some leaders said more than 30 MPs could be included in the outreach exercise.

The delegations will visit different countries for a period of 10 days.

Leaders including Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari, Anurag Thakur, Ravi Shankar Prasad, and Brij Lal are expected to be part of the delegation. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Not sure if INDIA bloc is still intact: P Chidambaram

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram voiced concerns about the INDIA bloc, saying he was not sure if the Opposition alliance was still intact.

Speaking at the launch of Salman Khurshid and Mritunjay Singh Yadav's book "Contesting Democratic Deficit", Chidambaram also said he felt that it showed at the seams that the alliance was frayed.

"The future (of INDIA bloc) is not so bright. If the alliance is totally intact, I will be very happy. But it shows at the seams that it is frayed," Chidambaram, a Rajya Sabha MP, said.

He also hoped that the alliance can "still be put together, there's still time".

> **The future (of INDIA bloc) is not so bright. If the alliance is totally intact, I will be very happy. But it shows at the seams that it is frayed**
>
> —P Chidambaram, Senior Congress leader

The former Union finance minister warned that the INDIA bloc was fighting against a "formidable machinery". "In my experience and my reading of history, there has been no political party so formidably organised as the BJP. It's not just another political party. It's a machine behind a machine and the two machines control all the machineries in India.

"From the Election Commission to the lowest police station in the country, they (BJP) are able to control and sometimes capture these institutions. It is a formidable machinery, as much as can be allowed in a democracy," Chidambaram said.

The Congress leader added that if the 2029 general elections take a decisive turn to strengthen the BJP, "we are beyond repair". *—PTI*

Russia, Ukraine agree to swap 1,000 POW

ISTANBUL, 16 MAY

Russia and Ukraine agreed on Friday to exchange 1,000 prisoners of war each, the head of Russia's delegation Vladimir Medinsky said. Medinsky also said Moscow and Kyiv agreed to provide each other with detailed proposals for a ceasefire. The two nations are holding their first direct peace talks in three years, gathering in Istanbul for Turkish-brokered negotiations. Officials had expect them to yield little progress on stopping the war. With Russian President Vladimir Putin not attending, his Ukranian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy attended a European leaders meeting of in Albania.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 6

LONG DRAWN DISPUTE

SC backs ISKCON B'luru in temple row

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Supreme Court of India has confirmed that the Hare Krishna temple in Bengaluru is under the control of ISKCON Bengaluru, effectively concluding a lengthy legal battle lasting 25 years. This ruling overturned a Karnataka High Court decision that had favoured ISKCON Mumbai regarding control over the iconic temple and its associated educational complex.

The judgement was delivered by a bench comprising Justices AS Oka and Augustine George Masih, who allowed ISKCON Bengaluru's plea challenging the High Court's May 2011 verdict, which had reversed a more favourable ruling from a local trial court the previous year. The trial court had acknowledged ISKCON Bengaluru's legal title to the property and issued a permanent injunction against ISKCON Mumbai. However, this was overturned by the High Court.

The verdict reaffirms ISKCON Bengaluru's commitment to Srila Prabhupada as the sole Acharya of ISKCON *PHOTO: PTI*

According to Madhu Pandit Dasa, President of ISKCON Bengaluru, this internal conflict was rooted in a struggle against self-proclaimed gurus who claimed succession rights over the founder, Srila Prabhupada, following his Maha Samadhi. He asserted that Srila Prabhupada instituted a Ritvik system in 1977, allowing initiations through appointed representatives, making all future devotees direct disciples of the founder.

Dasa noted ISKCON Mumbai attempted to expel ISKCON Bengaluru's devotees in 2000, demanding allegiance to their supposed gurus. The Supreme Court's decision has now barred ISKCON Mumbai from interfering in the management of ISKCON Bengaluru, allowing the latter to maintain its independence, as property and funds for the temple were raised locally. *—PTI*

Fanciful idea: SC on 43 Rohingyas thrown into sea

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Supreme Court on Friday rapped the petitioners who claimed 43 Rohingya refugees including women and children were dropped in the Andaman sea for deportation to Myanmar and said "when country is passing through a difficult time, you come out with fanciful ideas".

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh also questioned the authenticity of materials placed before it by petitioner Mohd Ismail and others and refused to stay any further deportation of Rohingyas saying similar relief was denied by the court.

"When the country is passing through a difficult time, you come out with such fanciful ideas," the bench told, appearing for the petitioners.

It said the materials placed by petitioners appeared to be taken from social media and termed the averments of torture and deportation of Rohingyas by throwing them into sea as "mere allegations".

The bench said recording of the alleged phone call conversation between those who were deported and the Delhi-based petitioner was not verified.

Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves referred to report of United Nations Human Rights Office of High Commissioner which took note of the issue, and said, "People sitting outside cannot dictate our authorities and sovereignty." *—PTI*

Police issue traffic curbs for IPL match today

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The Bengaluru Traffic Police issued a traffic advisory for Saturday, ahead of the IPL 2025 match at Chinnaswamy Stadium. Restrictions will be in place from 3pm to 11pm across key roads in the City centre. Traffic will be barred on Queens Road, MG Road, Link Road, and Raj Bhavan Road, with parking prohibited on Central Street, St Marks Road, Museum Road, Kasturba Road, Lavelle Road, and Vittal Mallya Road. Entry to Cubbon Road between Kamaraja Road and Dickenson Road will be restricted, except for BMTC buses. No parking will be allowed inside Cubbon Park, Kings Road, or near the Press Club. Spectators can park at St Joseph's Indian School Grounds, UB City, and the BMTC depot in Shivajinagar. KSCA members may use the St Joseph's European School parking. Entry and exit gates will be along Cubbon Road, Link Road, and Queens Road. Ola and Uber pick-up/drop points are designated near CTO Junction and BRV Grounds. *—Salar News*

ICG rescues 6 from sinking ship off Mangaluru coast

MANGALURU, 16 MAY

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) rescued six crew members from the vessel MSV SALAMATH, which sank 60 nautical miles off the coast of Mangaluru. The ship was sailing from New Mangalore Port in Karnataka to Kadmatt Island in Lakshadweep when it sent a distress alert. ICG ship Vikram, on patrol at the time, was promptly diverted to the area and carried out a swift rescue operation. All six sailors were safely evacuated, provided with medical assistance, and brought to New Mangalore Port. The ICG shared images of the operation and stated on X that the mission highlighted its unwavering commitment to saving lives and ensuring maritime safety in Indian waters. *—PTI*

Foreign national arrested for MDMA trafficking in City

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The Central Crime Branch (CCB) Narcotics Control Wing has apprehended a foreign national for allegedly distributing the prohibited narcotic substance MDMA crystal in Bengaluru. Following a tip-off, officers conducted a raid on 14 May at a residence in Achyuthanagar, under the jurisdiction of Soladevanahalli Police Station, where two foreign nationals were suspected of selling MDMA to locals, including college students and IT/BT professionals. During the operation, one suspect was apprehended while the other managed to escape. Authorities seized a substantial quantity of drugs, including 2 kg 585 grams of MDMA crystal, 1 kg 485 grams of a white substance, and 1 kg 100 grams of a brown substance, alongside an iPhone, a two-wheeler, and an electronic weighing machine. The arrested individual was presented to a court on 15 May and remanded to judicial custody. The CCB Narcotics Wing continues its investigation to locate the absconding suspect. *—ANI*

Civic elections to be held in 4 months, says DKS

Cong to hold an all-party meet prior to the civic body polls

MYUSURU, 16 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday said with the Greater Bengaluru Governance Act comming into effect, preparations will be made within four months for the polls for the municipal corporations.

Shivakumar, who also holds the Bengaluru Urban Development portfolio, said a process will be initiated soon regarding the reservation list and the creation of multiple municipal corporations.

The Greater Bengaluru Governance Act allows for the creation of up to seven municipal corporations to manage the City, and there are indications that the government may form three corporations.

"We will initiate the process regarding the reservation list and division soon. We have to hold elections; there is no point in delaying them. We will make the necessary arrangements within four months," Shivakumar said.

He said he will call an all-party meeting soon to seek suggestions.

BJP leaders who now are opposing GBA had agreed to it during the passage of the Bill. People understand such politics
-DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said the a process will be initiated soon about the reservation list for the polls **PHOTO: PTI**

"There was a plan to add new areas (to Greater Bengaluru), but that process would cause a delay, so we can add them later," he added.

"BJP leaders who now are opposing GBA had agreed to it during the passage of the Bill. People understand such politics," he said in response to a question about Leader of Opposition R Ashoka's criticisms of the Bill.

The Greater Bengaluru Governance Act, 2024, came into effect on 15 May, and the new Greater Bengaluru Area will be limited to the area now covered by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP).

Meanwhile, in a change of stance Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said India should have taken a sterner stance to eliminate terrorists in Pakistan.

"When the media asked me, should we wage war? I had said that there is no need for war, but if it is necessary, it should be waged. But it was distorted and as though I opposed war entirely".

—Salar News with agencies

AT KARWAR PORT

'Centre denied Iraqi ship crew entry'

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The Crew of an Iraqi cargo vessel were denied permission to disembark at Karwar port in Karnataka by the coastal security authorities as per special instructions given by the central government "after the Pakistan incident", Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Friday.

According to a senior port official, permission was not given for the crew of an Iraqi cargo vessel to disembark at Karwar port due to the presence of Pakistan and Syrian nationals among them. They were repatriated, he said on Wednesday.

Parameshwara said, "After this Pakistan incident, special instructions have been given by the Government of India to all the armed forces and the state departments. So, we as a state, have a coastal survey force... they have stopped (the crew of an Iraqi cargo vessel from disembarking at Karwar port)... I think whatever the instructions have been given to them, they have done a good job," he told reporters here.

According to senior port officials, the ship, which had departed from Al Zubair, Iraq, was carrying bitumen and docked at Karwar with a crew comprising 15 Indian nationals, one Pakistani, and two Syrians.

Following standard inspection protocols and heightened vigilance, the presence of Pakistani and Syrian nationals aboard the vessel prompted a security response from port authorities and the Coastal Security Police, he said. *—PTI*

HIGH COMMAND'S CALL

CM to decide on cabinet reshuffle: HM

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Amid reports of pressure for a cabinet reshuffle within the ruling Congress, Home Minister G Parameshwara on Friday said the party high command and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will decide on it. The Siddaramaiah-led government completes two years in office on 20 May.

"I don't know about it, and I would not like to comment on it. There may be aspirants, as we have 138 Congress MLAs, and among them, only a few can become ministers. The high command and the chief minister will decide on it," Parameshwara told reporters in response to a question on the cabinet reshuffle, amid demands within the Congress for sitting ministers to make way for others.

There has also been a demand from a section of MLAs, who are ministerial aspirants, to be inducted into the cabinet. Some have even openly expressed their wish to become ministers.

The State cabinet has not been reshuffled since the formation of the government in May 2023.

Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

Responding to a question on Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot sending several bills, including —The Karnataka Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill 2024 and The Karnataka Souharda Sahakari (Amendment) Bill 2024—recently to the President, despite a Supreme Court ruling, Parameshwara said. *—PTI*

Only 31% pass rate in 2nd PUC exams

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The Karnataka School Examination and Assessment Board (KSEAB) has revealed the results for the Second PUC Exam-2, recording a pass rate of 31.27 per cent. Out of the 194,077 students who sat the exam, 60,692 achieved passing marks.

Held between 24 April and 8 May across 332 examination centres, this exam provided a supplementary opportunity for students who previously failed or aimed to improve their scores.

The overall pass percentage, including reappearing and private candidates, was slightly higher at 35.26 per cent.

Notably, 71,964 candidates retook the exam specifically to enhance their marks, with 41,719 succeeding in their attempts.

Out of the 194,077 students who sat the exam, only 60,692 achieved passing marks **PHOTO: KARRESULT.NIC.IN**

The majority of these improvement efforts focused on Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics, reflecting a concerted drive to boost rankings for the Common Entrance Test (CET).

Officials confirmed that updated marks from this round will be factored into CET seat allotments, facilitating access to professional courses such as engineering.

KSEAB has scheduled a third and final round of exams, Exam-3, from 9 to 20 June. Remedial coaching will be available, with no fees for failed candidates.

However, improvement and private candidates will incur charges. The Education Department urges students and parents to take this final opportunity seriously to prevent further academic delays. *—Salar News*

MAN KILLS WIFE OVER INFIDELITY SUSPICION

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

A 47-year-old woman was allegedly murdered by her husband in Subbaiahnapalya under Banaswadi Police Station limits on Friday. Initially on the run, the accused surrendered to the police. The accused, Ramesh, suspected his wife, Kalaivani of having an illicit relationship. Ramesh was a carpenter by profession while Kalaivani used to work as a domestic help. According to police, the couple got into a heated argument around 4am on Friday, during which, Ramesh allegedly picked up a chisel used in his woodworking and stabbed Kalaivani multiple times, killing her on the spot. *—Salar News*

State to get electric buses, says HDK

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The State is set to receive electric buses in a "phased and prioritised manner" under the Centre's flagship PM E-Drive Scheme, as announced by Union Heavy Industries Minister HD Kumaraswamy on Friday.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries has received a formal proposal from the State government, which highlighted the urgent need for improved urban public transport systems in major cities.

State's Transport Minister, Ramalinga Reddy, presented this request, emphasising the importance of enhanced mobility solutions.

Kumaraswamy assured the State government of the Centre's full support, stating that the allocation process is already in progress. "I will ensure that Karnataka receives all due support from the Government of India," he affirmed, reiterating the government's commitment to transforming public transport under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The initiative aims to allocate over 14,000 electric buses to nine major cities, with a financial outlay of Rs 10,900 crore for the two-year period from 1 April, 2024, to 31 March, 2026. Discussions have also focused on associated infrastructure, including the establishment of charging stations, bus depots, and vehicle maintenance systems. Officials from both the Union and state governments are exploring implementation models to ensure a swift rollout across identified clusters, according to a statement. *—PTI*

Counselling must for skill dvpt dept transfers

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Dr Sharan Prakash Patil, the Minister for Medical Education and Skill Development, announced on Friday that all general transfers within the skill development department will now be conducted through a counselling process to eliminate recommendation-driven transfers.

During a departmental review meeting at Vikasa Soudha, Dr Patil instructed department secretary Ekroop Caur to develop clear guidelines, particularly for the Department of Employment and Training (DET), which has one of the largest staffing bases. "This initiative aims to eradicate the misuse of influence in transfers, allowing employees to secure postings based on merit and personal preference," he stated.

Dr Patil expressed his dissatisfaction with senior officials, citing inefficiency, and issued show-cause notices along with immediate transfers for those found negligent in their roles related.

Sharan Prakash Patil. **PHOTO: ANI**

He urged training institutions such as the Government Tool Room & Training Centre (GTTC), Karnataka German Technical Training Institute (KGTTI), and entities linked to the National Livelihood Mission (NLM) to actively recruit applicants from Yuvanidhi and job fairs into skill courses. *—Salar News*

Driver held for stealing Rs 22L from actress' car

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

A 45-year-old cab driver has been arrested for allegedly stealing a handbag containing valuables worth Rs 22.5 lakh from a parked car belonging to Kannada actress Rukmini Vijayakumar. The incident occurred near Cubbon Park on the morning of 11 May, prompting the actress to file a complaint with local police.

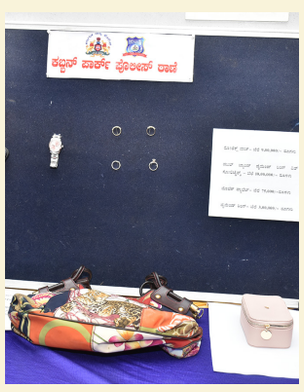
Rukmini, a resident of Koramangala, had parked her car on Queens Road while on her morning walk.

Rukmini Vijayakumar **PHOTO: SALAR**

Unbeknownst to her, she left the boot of her vehicle unlocked, with the handbag inside containing two diamond rings valued at Rs 14 lakh, a wristwatch worth Rs 9 lakh, a wallet worth Rs 75,000, and ear pods valued at Rs 20,000.

Upon returning, she was dismayed to discover the handbag missing and realised her oversight in not securing the boot. Following the report, local police scrutinised CCTV footage from the area, leading them to identify the suspect, Mohammad Mastan, at his home in Mahalakshmi Layout.

Mastan confessed to the crime and returned the stolen items to the police, who subsequently handed them back to the actress. *—Salar News*



The actress' handbag **PHOTO: SALAR**

CASE FILED

Black magic to shoo away grape farmer's buyers?

The farmer noticed vermilion, eggs, flowers and black thread in his field. He claimed that grape vines dried up within a next few days **PHOTO: SALAR**

CHIKKABALLAPURA, 16 MAY

Miscreants have allegedly carried out black magic to prevent a farmer from getting a good price for his crops at Nakkanahalli in Bengaluru Rural district.

Prabhakar, the farmer, had cultivated black grapes in about 2.10 acres of his vineyard at Nakkanahalli and expected to a good proifit by selling his produce.

Though he had been cultivating dry crops for the past few years, he decided to grow grapes this year, incurring an expenditure of nearly Rs 20 lakhs in the process. He had borrowed about Rs 15 lakhs from a bank and another few lakhs from private financiers.

Having a good yield of fifteen to twenty tons of crops, Prabhakar expected to earn around Rs eight to 10 lakhs through their sale.

A couple of buyers had reportedly visited his farm a few days back. However, Prabhakar was in for a rude shock as he spotted some items used in black magic in his yard.

Prabhakar noticed vermilion, eggs, flowers and black thread at many places in his yard and also near the pond in his field. He claimed that a couple of grape vines had also dried up within the next few days. Even his buyers were reluctant to come to purchase his crops.

Prabhakar expressed doubts about his distant cousin, Muni Reddy's hand in these activities.

He said he also took corrective reassures to remove the dried grape vines and the various suspicious objects found scattered at various places on his farm. He is also on the lookout for prospective buyers.

The farmer lodged a complaint with the Nandhi Giridhama Hills Police Station, seeking action against the miscreants. *—Salar News*

2 employees held for stealing gold from bank

KOPPAL, 16 MAY

In a case that raises serious questions about internal security at financial institutions, two bank employees were arrested for allegedly stealing gold jewellery from a customer's locker.

Basaveshwaranagar police on Wednesday arrested the duo and recovered 170 grams of gold ornaments valued at Rs 16 lakh.

The victim, a resident of Byadarahalli and branch manager at a bank in Basaveshwaranagar, had availed the bank's locker facility to store gold ornaments, mark sheets, degree certificates and cheque books. During a routine check in December, he was shocked to discover 250 grams of gold jewellery had gone missing. He filed a police complaint.

During the investigation, police zeroed in on a suspect residing in NGO's Colony, Kamalanagar. Interrogation revealed that he had colluded with a female colleague at the same bank to commit the theft. Using duplicate keys available within the bank, the pair discreetly opened the locker, removed the gold, and locked it again to avoid detection.

The stolen jewellery was later sold to a jeweller in Agrahara Dasarahalli. Acting on this lead, the jurisdictional police recovered 170 grams of gold ornaments from the jewellery shop. *—Salar news*

ED conducts fresh searches in TN TASMAC case

CHENNAI, 16 MAY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday conducted fresh searches in connection with the Tamil Nadu's Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation Limited (TASMAC)-linked money laundering case, officials said. About 10 locations linked to TASMAC officials and agents are being raided in Chennai under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said. Some hawala operators and cash collection agents are also being searched, they said. TASMAC is with the exclusive rights for wholesale supply of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and beer in the state with 43 depots and nearly 5,000 retail units spread across the state. The federal probe agency had conducted the first set of raids in this case in March. *—PTI*

Man detained in Indore for anti-nat'l slogans

INDORE, 16 MAY

A 25-year-old man was booked and detained in Indore in Madhya Pradesh on Friday for allegedly raising anti-national slogans and making other objectionable remarks, a police official said. An FIR has been registered against a migrant labourer working in the Indore metro project under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 152 (act endangering the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India) and Section 196 (act adversely affecting mutual harmony of different communities), Deputy Commissioner of Police Vinod Kumar Meena told PTI. "We received a complaint after a video went viral, which showed this person raising anti-national slogans and saying other objectionable things. He has been detained. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Omar, Mehbooba's war of words over Tulbul project

SRINAGAR, 16 MAY

What started as a war of words between Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti over former's call to revive the Tulbul Navigation Barrage project on Wullar Lake turned into a mud-slinging match, with J&K CM accusing his predecessor of taking conversation to gutter level. The altercation broke out after Mufti said Abdullah's call to revive Tulbul Navigation Barrage project in view of suspension of Indus Waters Treaty was "irresponsible" and "dangerously provocative". CM hit back at the PDP President, saying she refuses to acknowledge that the IWT was a "historic betrayal" with the people of J&K because of her "blind lust" to score "cheap" publicity points. *—PTI*

FIR against Sudhakaran over postal ballot talk

ALAPPUZHA, 16 MAY

Veteran CPI(M) leader G Sudhakaran has come under scrutiny following his controversial remarks about the 1989 Alappuzha Lok Sabha election. An FIR was filed against him on Friday, citing violations of Representation of People Act and various sections of the Indian Penal Code. Sudhakaran claimed that postal ballots were opened during election, suggesting tampering and intimidation of voters. Election Commission has since initiated an investigation, and Sudhakaran acknowledged that his earlier statements were exaggerated. FIR was prompted by a report from District Collector, who serves as District Election Officer. Unsubstantiated claims included assertions that NGO union members were discouraged from voting for rival candidates, allegedly with improper oversight of postal ballots. *—PTI*

Govt to send all-party teams abroad

MP Shashi Tharoor might lead the delegation which aims to expose Pakistan's terrorism

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

As part of a major diplomatic offensive, the government will send several all-party delegations to different countries, starting next week, to expose Pakistan-sponsored terrorism on the world forum.

The diplomatic exercise aimed at presenting India's stance against Pakistan on terror comes in the wake of Operation Sindoor.

Senior leaders, including MPs, of various political parties, including those from the opposition, have been sounded out by the government and some parties have also given their go-ahead to the presence of their members for the diplomatic exercise.

Sources said some former ministers would lead the delegations of MPs from different parties to a cluster of countries across the world.

While there was no clarity on the exact number of delegations or their members, some leaders said more than 30 MPs could be included in the outreach exercise.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor is the head of the parliamentary panel on foreign affairs in India *PHOTO: PTI*

The delegations will visit different countries for a period of 10 days. The MPs will visit different blocs of countries, as earmarked by the government.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) will brief the MPs before they depart.

Among the parties whose MPs will be part of the delegation are the BJP, Congress, TMC, DMK, NCP (SP), JDU, BJD, CPI(M), and some others, the sources said.

Despite Congress MP Shashi Tharoor's recently made comments about Operation Sindoor, which some party leaders felt went too far, sources said that he is likely to be given an important role in representing India internationally during the exercise.

- The lists of MPs who will be taking part in the exercise will be prepared by the MAE along with Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha secretariats.

Tharoor might lead the all-party delegation as well as the head of the parliamentary panel on foreign affairs in India.

The delegation is said to begin its visit to Europe and Gulf countries, sources said.

The lists of MPs who will be taking part in the exercise will be prepared by the MAE along with Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha secretariats. *– PTI*

Mortar shell found in village on Jammu outskirts

JAMMU, 16 MAY

Security forces detected and defused a mortar shell in a village on the outskirts of Jammu, officials said on Friday. They said the mortar shell was fired from Pakistan during the recent military standoff.

Locals found the heavy shell near the fields in a village in Bishnah area and informed police, officials said. A bomb disposal squad was called to the spot and defused the shell, they said. *– PTI*

Soldiers bow at Modi's feet: MP DyCM draws Oppn ire

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Congress on Friday accused BJP of "insulting the Army" after Madhya Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Jagdish Devda made a comment stating that the soldiers to bow at the feet of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The remarks came days after Madhya Pradesh minister Vijay Shah came under fire for his alleged objectionable remarks on Col Sofiya Qureshi, who was a prominent face of the armed forces during media briefings on Operation Sindoor along with Wing Commander Vyomika Singh.

Speaking at an event, Devda allegedly said, "We would like to thank the Prime Minister. The entire country, the country's army and those soldiers bow at the feet of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji... for the befitting response he gave."

The people of entire country are proud of the valour of the army but the BJP people are "insulting" the army and instead of taking action against these leaders, BJP is trying its best to save them, Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alleged.

At a press conference here, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate played a video of Devda's remarks and asked whether anyone can imagine any Indian ever saying something as "blasphemous and brazenly shameless" as that.

Jagdish Devda *PHOTO: X*

- The remarks came days after Madhya Pradesh minister Vijay Shah came under fire for his alleged objectionable remarks on Col Sofiya Qureshi.

"The entire country is grateful for what our armed forces have done. They have consistently taught a lesson to our enemies. Our armed forces have divided Pakistan into two. We have always given a befitting reply in 1965, 1971, 1999, and even after the Pahalgam terror strike. Our armed forces brought Pakistan to its knees by consistently destroying terrorist camps in Pakistan," she said. *– PTI*

India calls for boycott on Turkish goods

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

In response to escalating diplomatic tensions with Turkey, Indian markets and the entertainment industry are taking decisive action against Turkish goods. Azadpur Mandi, Asia's largest wholesale fruit and vegetable market, has announced a halt to imports of Turkish apples. Chairman Meetha Ram Kriplani confirmed that while existing orders will be honoured, no new orders will be placed, reflecting disappointment after a peak import of 116,000 tonnes in 2024.

Simultaneously, the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) has called for a boycott of Turkish shows on streaming platforms like Netflix and Prime Video, citing Turkey's support for Pakistan amid rising strains. They urged the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to impose restrictions on Turkish content.

The situation led Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL) to terminate services with Turkish firm Celebi Airport Services for national security reasons, assuring that airport operations would continue uninterrupted with alternative providers. The All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) also expressed solidarity, recommending the suspension of all business transactions with Turkey and Azerbaijan in light of their support for Pakistan during recent military conflicts.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta checks watermelons during a visit at Azadpur Mandi, in New Delhi, on Friday, Delhi traders have boycotted Turkish products *PHOTO: PTI*

In a collaborative effort reflecting national sentiment, Indian traders from over 24 states declared a complete boycott of Turkish and Azerbaijani goods, effective immediately.

Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal emphasised that there would be no imports or exports with either country, and urged the film industry to avoid shooting in Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Protests from traders in Delhi further underscored the sentiment, with calls for a complete ban on Turkish products, citing a "deep offense" to Indian national sentiment. *– PTI/Agencies*

Kannur CPI (M) accused of insulting Mahatma Gandhi

KANNUR, 16 MAY

Congress on Friday accused the leaders of ruling CPI (M) in Kannur district of Kerala of insulting Mahatma Gandhi.

The party sought legal action against Left leader who allegedly "threatened" that construction of Ghandhi's statue would not be allowed in Malappattam in Kannur.

Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan said the police should register a case against CPI(M) district secretariat member PV Gopinath for threatening to disallow the construction of the statue in the area.

A similar threat was issued by CPI(M) Kannur district secretary. Congress leaders and workers had protested in Malappattam against the alleged vandalism of a statue of Gandhi installed by party.

CPI(M) and Youth Congress workers clashed during the march, with both sides allegedly hurling stones and bottles at each other, leading to a tense situation that lasted a few hours.

While the Congress accused CPI(M), the CPI(M) did not respond to these charges. *– PTI*

Stalin to consult other states over President's query

UDHAGAMANDALAM, 16 MAY

Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin announced on Friday that state will consult with other CMs and political leaders regarding President Droupadi Murmu's recent query to Supreme Court. It concerns whether judicial orders can impose timelines on President's discretion when dealing with bills passed by state assemblies. She invoked Article 143(1) of Constitution, a provision rarely exercised, to seek Supreme Court's opinion on this matter. *– PTI*

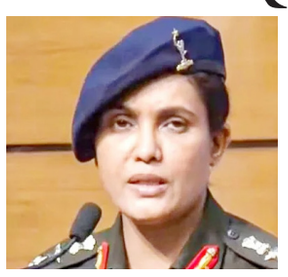
SC junks PIL on deepfake videos of Col Qureshi

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Supreme Court of India today dismissed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) regarding the circulation of AI-generated deepfake videos featuring Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, a member of the team involved in briefing Operations. The petition sought the establishment of a court-monitored expert panel to draft a model law addressing online deepfake content.

A bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and N. Kotiswar Singh acknowledged the seriousness of the issue but pointed out that it is currently being addressed by Delhi High Court, which has been hearing similar matters for the past two years. The bench expressed concern that entertaining petition could undermine the High Court's ongoing efforts.

Petitioner Narendra Kumar Goswami expressed his distress over the proliferation of counterfeit videos of Colonel Qureshi, emphasising the urgent need for regulatory measures to combat such cybercrimes. The justices noted rapid pace at which cybercriminals operate, suggesting that new videos could surface even before the petitioner exits the courtroom.



Sofiya Qureshi *PHOTO: PTI*

In a bid to ensure the matter receives proper consideration, the Supreme Court encouraged the High Court to hear Goswami's suggestions as an intervenor in the ongoing proceedings.

The Supreme Court's decision to relegate the matter to the Delhi High Court underscores the importance of coordinated judicial efforts in tackling emerging challenges posed by technology in the digital age. *– PTI*

MP Minister no stranger to rows on women

BHOPAL, 16 MAY

For Madhya Pradesh Tribal Affairs Minister Vijay Shah, currently under fire for his comments aimed at Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, this is not the first time he has been embroiled in a controversy. In the past, he was accused of making offensive comments on former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's wife and kicking up a row with a dinner invite to Bollywood actor Vidya Balan during a film shoot in MP. On the orders of the MP High Court, police have booked Shah for making objectionable remarks about Col Qureshi. Amid criticism, Shah has said if anyone is hurt by his statement, he is ready to apologise 10 times, adding that he respects Colonel Qureshi more than his sister. *– PTI*

EYES IN THE SKY

'India to become self-reliant in fighter jet making in next few yrs'

BERHAMPUR, 16 MAY

India will become self-reliant in making fighter jets in the next few years, said Kota Harinarayana, the former programme director and chief designer of India's Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas.

Harinarayana, the Padma Shri awardee, said the ecosystem of manufacturing of aircraft has been developed in the country.

The technology for production of indigenous aircraft has also improved, and within a few years, India will make a series of fighter jets of all categories to address the need of the Indian Air Force, he said.

"I hope that in the next few years, India will make all fighter jets required for defence and will also start exporting these to our friendly countries," Harinarayana said. The technology that the country had developed for Tejas has been carried forward from small- to medium-sized and unmanned aircraft, he said.

India's Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas *PHOTO: PTI*

The wider use of Tejas by the IAF has proven the significance and importance of the indigenously built aircraft, he said.

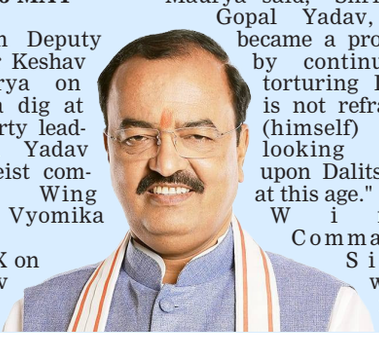
Harinarayana also hailed India's successful trial of "Bhargavastra", an indigenous, budget-friendly counter-drone system, in Gopalpur in Odisha's Ganjam district on Wednesday. *– PTI*

UP DYCM ATTACKS YADAV OVER HIS CASTEIST REMARKS

LUCKNOW, 16 MAY

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya on Friday took a dig at Samajwadi Party leader Ramgopal Yadav over his casteist comment on Wing Commander Vyomika Singh.

In a post on X on Friday, Keshav Prasad Maurya said, "Shri Ram Gopal Yadav, who became a professor by continuously torturing Dalits, is not refraining (himself) from looking down upon Dalits even at this age."



Wing Commander Singh was a regular face in the press briefings on Operation Sindoor along with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Colonel Sofiya Qureshi.

Yadav added, "Let me tell you. Vyomika Singh is a Jatav from Haryana and Air Marshal Bharti is a Yadav from Purnia. So all three were from the PDA (picchda, Dalit, alpsankhyak or backwards, Dalits and minorities)." – PTI

69 bonded labourers rescued in Maharashtra

PALGHAR, 16 MAY

Authorities have successfully rescued 69 bonded labourers, including minors, from Ahilyanagar district in Maharashtra, following a tip-off from local activists. The victims were subjected to forced labour in stone cutting and sheep farming. Acting on the information, officials conducted a raid on Thursday, initially rescuing 16 individuals before locating the full group. Sandeep Harmalkar, a labour officer, confirmed the operation's success and highlighted the ongoing struggle against bonded labour, which is prohibited under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act in India. DSP Kunal Sonawane, said three out of six suspects involved in the exploitation have been arrested, with efforts underway to apprehend the remaining individuals. *—PTI*

Fired teachers protest outside WB education dept HQ

KOLKATA, 16 MAY

A day after violent clashes erupted between protesting school teachers and police in front of the West Bengal Education Department's headquarters in Salt Lake, demonstrators resumed their protests outside Bikash Bhavan on Friday. The teachers are fighting for the reinstatement of their jobs following a Supreme Court ruling that annulled the appointments of 25,753 teachers in government-aided schools due to recruitment irregularities. Many injured during Thursday's confrontations returned to the protest site, joined by supporters and members of the Deserving Teachers' Rights Forum. They are demanding direct talks with the Chief Minister and oppose a requirement to retake a recruitment test after passing the 2016 School Service Commission examinations. *—PTI*

MP HC stays NEET results over power outage plea

INDORE, 16 MAY

The Indore bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court has issued an interim stay on the results of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET-UG) following a plea from a girl student who claims her performance was hindered by a power outage at her exam centre. The NEET-UG was conducted on 4 May, coinciding with significant power disruptions in the city due to adverse weather conditions. Justice Subodh Abhyankar acknowledged the impact of the power cut and directed that results should not be declared until further notice. The case is scheduled for another hearing on 30 June. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Actor Vijay Razz acquitted in sexual harassment case

MUMBAI, MAY 16

The additional chief judicial magistrate's Court in Gondia, Maharashtra, acquitted actor Vijay Razz of all charges in a sexual harassment case filed against him in 2020. The incident allegedly took place during the shooting of a film in Gondia and Balaghat. The judgment, cleared the actor, 51, of allegations under Indian Penal Code Sections 354-A (sexual harassment) and 354-D (stalking), citing lack of evidence and failure of the prosecution to establish guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. The case dated back to October, 2020, when a female crew member accused Razz of inappropriate behaviour, including unwelcome physical contact and suggestive remarks, at Hotel Gateway in Gondia and later at Jatashankar College in Balaghat. *—Agencies*

SC asks Mamata to clear 25% DA dues to staffers

Employees receive 18 per cent DA after a 4 per cent hike

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The Supreme Court on Friday issued an interim order directing the West Bengal government to pay 25 per cent of the pending dearness allowance to its employees within four weeks.

A bench of Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice Manoj Misra issued the order, while scheduling the next hearing on August.

The apex court said on Friday that there was no error in the previous Calcutta High Court ruling. The state government has been asked to pay 25 per cent of the pending DA without further delay.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Bannerjee had announced a 4 per cent increase in DA of all state government employees in the state budget in 2025. With his hike, the employees are now entitled to 18 per cent DA.

Senior advocate and Congress MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for the Weat Bengal government said that the state government was unable to pay the full arrears as it severely affect the state's coffers.

State government employees had approached the Calcutta High Court demanding DA at par with that received by the employees of the central government. They had also demanded the clearance of pending DA by the state government at the earliest. Central government employees are entitled to a DA of 55 per cent at present.

The Calcutta High Court in a hearing on May 20, 2022 directed the Bengal government to pay DA at 31 per cent, which was equivalent to the DA received by central government employees at that time.

The Bengal government however, challenged this order in the Supreme Court in 2022. The order comes after a prolonged legal battle, with hearings being postponed 18 times. *—Salar News*

SC bins fresh pleas against Waqf law

New Delhi, 16 MAY

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to examine a couple of fresh pleas challenging the constitutional validity of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, saying everybody wants name in newspapers. A bench comprising Chief Justice B R Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih said it would decide the pending matter scheduled to come up on May 20.

The point of interim relief in the case will be heard then. The counsel for the petitioner had filed the petition on 8 April and removed the defects pointed out by the apex court registry on 15 April. *—PTI*

42 MONTHS ON BENCH

11th woman judge in Supreme Court demits office

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Justice Bela M Trivedi, who was the eleventh woman judge to be elevated to the Supreme Court in its 75-year-old history on Friday demitted office after spending three-and-a-half years on the bench.

Justice Trivedi, who was elevated to the top court in August, 2021 was part of the several landmark judgements.

Justice Trivedi sat in the ceremonial bench headed by Chief Justice BR Gavai as a tradition marking the exit.

She as part of several Constitution benches passed several landmark judgements like upholding 10 per cent reservation for economically weaker sections in admissions and government jobs and of states being constitutionally empowered to make sub-classifications within the Scheduled Castes for granting reservation to backward castes.

Born on June 10, 1960 at Patan in north Gujarat, she was a lawyer in the Gujarat High Court for about 10 years.

She was appointed as a judge, city civil and sessions court at Ahmedabad in 1995 and served as a judge of the Gujarat High Court and Rajasthan High Court.

Meanwhile, CJI Gavai deprecated the decision of the Supreme Court Bar Association of not holding the usual farewell ceremony for Justice Trivedi.

The CJI, in his address, hailed Justice Trivedi for her rise from the district judiciary to the apex court and delivering justice with hard work and dedication. The apex court endorsed Justice Trivedi's integrity and fairness.

The SCBA did not hold farewell functions for Justice Trivedi's possibly because of some decisions going against lawyers affiliated it. *—PTI*

Assam tightens policy on fighting social evils

GUWAHATI, 16 MAY

The Assam government on Friday notified a state policy aimed at combating human trafficking and witch-hunting to ensure that all people can live a life of equal worth, free from all forms of abuse.

"The Assam State Policy to Combat Human Trafficking and End Witch-Hunting is now officially notified. A significant move to safeguard human rights and uphold dignity," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) posted on X.

The vision is to ensure all individuals live a life of equal worth

The policy's mission is to "provide a safe and equal society wherein all individuals can claim their entitlements and access all services, lead a life free from all kinds of violence, experience an enhancement in their capabilities and exercise control over their life circumstances through convergence and synergies among all departments for promoting safety and security".

The policy acknowledged that human trafficking and witch-hunting are two crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls.

While human trafficking is an organised crime, witch-hunting is mostly a social crime rooted in deep-seated regressive cultural practices, it said. *—PTI*

PETTING A BIG CAT

A man walks near an adult tiger, as another risks his life to pet cubs sitting inside a concrete pipe near the Daulada Devpura dam region in Rajasthan's Ranthambore Park recently **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

THUNDERSTORMS, RAINS TO POUND AP TILL 20 MAY

AMARAVATI, 16 MAY

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Friday forecast thunderstorms and heavy rainfall in parts of Andhra Pradesh from 16 to 20 May, accompanied by lightning and gusty winds reaching speeds of up to 60 km per hour.

The weather department predicted thunderstorms in isolated areas of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh, and Rayalaseema.

"There will be no significant change in maximum temperatures from Day 1 (May 16) to Day 7 (May 22), with a slight tendency to fall over Andhra Pradesh and Yanam," the IMD said.

The IMD also predicted very heavy rains in north Kerala from next week. It issued an orange alert in Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod districts for Monday. It also issued an orange alert in Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod districts for Tuesday.

Tt also issued a yellow alert in six districts – Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod – for May 18. *—PTI*

ED detains 'Gujarat Samachar' owner

AHMEDABAD, 16 MAY

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday detained Bahubali Shah, one of the owners of the leading Gujarati newspaper 'Gujarat Samachar', following a raid on their premises here, sources said.

Bahubali is one of the directors of Lok Prakashan Limited, which owns the Gujarat Samachar. His elder brother, Shreyansh Shah, is the managing editor of the daily.

Tushar Dave, head of digital services at GSTV, a Gujarati news channel run by Shreyansh, said the ED detained Bahubali in the early hours of Friday.

In a Facebook post, Dave said Shah was first taken to VS Hospital by the ED and then admitted to Zydus Hospital in the city after his health condition deteriorated.

Bahubali Shah **PHOTO: PTI**

The federal anti-money laundering agency has not yet issued any statement about the reasons behind its action.

A Gujarat Samachar employee said the ED detained Bahubali early on Friday, and he is in the hospital.

The Income Tax department searched the GSTV premises in Ahmedabad for nearly 36 hours. The ED raided the premises on Thursday evening, soon after I-T officials left, Dave said in another Facebook post. *—PTI*

Prof 'molests' 12 students in Roorkee during exam

DEHRADUN, 16 MAY

A 55-year-old assistant professor was arrested for allegedly molesting 12 students at the Government Degree College in Roorkee, the police said Friday.

According to the complaint filed by a victim, Dr Abdul Alim Ansari allegedly touched the students inappropriately during the viva of the B.Sc practical examinations on Thursday afternoon, the police said, adding that the incident occurred in a closed room.

Ansari also allegedly wrote his mobile number on the palm of a student, asking her to call him at night after returning home, Gang Nahar police station inspector in-charge RK Saklani said.

When a victim shared what she went through after coming out of the room, the other students revealed how they had also been touched inappropriately by the professor.

After being confronted by the students, Ansari allegedly threatened to cut their marks. A complaint was filed by one of the victims following which Ansari was arrested. *—PTI*

India scales to 151 on World Press Freedom Index

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

India's ranking on the World Press Freedom Index improved to 151 among the 180 countries surveyed by Reporters Without Borders in 2025 from 159 in 2024.

Finland, Estonia and the Netherlands take up the top three positions in the index that sought responses from more than 5,000 persons from across the world to finalise the rankings.

"We have surveyed 5,000 respondents across the world. It comprises a diverse set of people including policymakers, journalists and other stakeholders," Thibaut Bruttin, assistant director general of Reporters Without Borders said.

While Bruttin refused to divulge the respondents' identities, he insisted that it was a diverse set representing different ideologies.

India has nearly 900 privately-owned television channels, half of which are dedicated to news.

Around 1,40,000 publications are published in more than 20 languages, including some 20,000 daily newspapers with a combined circulation of more than 390 million copies, Reporters Without Borders said.

The US ranks 57th on the index, slipping two positions from the previous year's ranking.

Even in highly-ranked countries such as Australia (29th), Canada (21st) and Czechia (10th), media concentration is a cause for concern, Reporters Without Borders said. *—PTI*

NRA ALLOWED AADHAAR-BASED CHECK

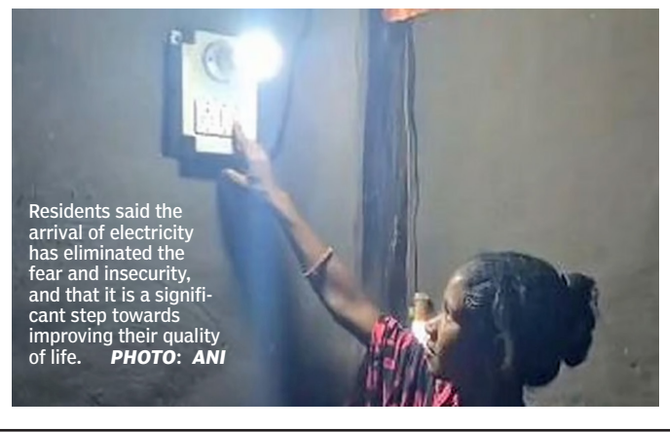
NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Centre has allowed the National Recruitment Agency, mandated to conduct online examinations to screen government job aspirants, to perform Aadhaar-based authentications.

The agency shall adhere to all the relevant provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, (as amended) read with Rule 5 of the Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Rules, 2020, and directions issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India. *—PTI*

RAY OF HOPE

17 remote Naxal-hit villages get electricity for the first time



Residents said the arrival of electricity has eliminated the fear and insecurity, and that it is a significant step towards improving their quality of life. **PHOTO: ANI**

RAIPUR, 16 MAY

Seventeen villages nestled among nearly inaccessible mountains and dense forests in Naxal-hit Mohla-Manpur-Ambagarh Chowki district of Chhattisgarh have got electricity from the supply grid for the first time.

About 540 families will benefit from the electrification, which has been done at Rs 3 crore under the Mukhyamantri Majratola Vidyutikaran Yojana.

Difficult terrain made reaching these areas extremely challenging amid the Naxalite threat. Providing the electricity supply through the grid was no less than a mission in these villages.

The villages had access to solar power to light up bulbs, but faced maintenance issues. Solar panels got stolen, forcing children to study under kerosene lamps.

Celebrations broke out in the villages – Katuljhora, Kattapar, Bodra, Bukmarka, Sambalpur, Gattegahan, Pugda, Amakodo, Petemeta, Tatekasa, Kundalkal, Raimanhora, Nainguda, Metatodke, Kohkatola, Edasmeta and Kunjakanhar – after they were connected to the power grid recently

Children danced and the elderly burst crackers to express their happiness as it was the moment they had waited for decades.

Of the 540 families in these 17 villages, 275 have got electricity connections so far. The work to provide the power supply to the remaining households is underway.

Securing a no objection certificate (NOC) from the forest department and transporting the equipment for laying the 11 KV line to these remote villages were challenging.

"The priority of the government is to ensure the development of basic facilities in hyper-sensitive areas. Electricity will soon be provided to other villages in the region," an official said said.

Manpur-Mohla-Ambagarh Chowki district, located around 150 km from the capital Raipur, shares its borders with the Naxal-hit Bastar region of the state and Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. *—PTI*

ENRAGED BY TARIFFS

Taiwanese farmers held slogans that read 'Farmers Angry' to protest against the government's plan to reduce the import tariffs on American agricultural products to zero in Taipei, Taiwan, on Friday. Taiwan was one of the countries that fell under US President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs, announced on 2 April 2025. The Trump administration had imposed 32 per cent tariffs on Taiwanese goods ***PHOTO: – PTI***

Drones set new standards in warfare strategy

Operation Sindoor has brought into sharp focus the importance of drones in modern warfare, which along with space and cyberspace will write the new paradigm of future military conflicts, a former director general of Military Operations who oversaw the Doklam crisis, has said.

In an interview with PTI Videos on Thursday, retired Lt general Anil Kumar Bhatt also expressed his displeasure at suggestions in social media by many warmongers who were unhappy with the conflict ending in four days on the grounds that it was an opportunity to reclaim Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

He said war should be the last option and should not be waged since India had achieved its strategic aims.

Drones and cyberspace define future warfare; India asserts strategic strength, not war for PoK ***PHOTO: PTI***

"Let me tell you, a war or taking back Pak-occupied Kashmir, should be a war of choice, taken by a decision. That is not what was planned this time. Yes, the Indian military was prepared for it, if the escalating ladder took you there," said Bhatt, who is guiding the growth of the private space technology sector in the country after retirement in June 2020.

As DGMO, Bhatt was one of the most senior military officers in the hierarchy, in-charge of ensuring that the armed forces were operationally ready at all times.

Reporting directly to the Army Chief, the DGMO is intimately involved in shaping strategies to deal with immediate and long-term security challenges, besides coordinating with the other two services as well as civilian and paramilitary security forces.

In times of crisis and escalated tensions, it falls on the DGMO to communicate with his opposite number. Currently, the DGMO is Lt Gen Rajiv Ghai.

Bhatt was DGMO in 2017 when India was locked in a 73-day military standoff with China in the Doklam tri-junction near the Sikkim sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). A four-star lieutenant general is the second highest rank in the Army, below a five-star general. A Field Marshal is largely a ceremonial or war-time rank.

"So what I would tell all my fellow countrymen is, war is a serious business. A very, very serious business.

And a nation goes for it when all possible options are over. We had options less than war (during the current crisis) and gave a sense to it," said Bhatt, who spent 38 years in the Army.

Asked how important drones were in the latest conflict, he said the unmanned aerial vehicles have created an entirely new paradigm in warfare and the militaries of the world began focussing on it when they achieved spectacular success for Azerbaijan in winning a nearly lost war against a well-armed Armenia. The drones were Turkish made.

Bhatt agreed that relatively inexpensive drones costing as little as Rs 2 lakh were able to destroy armoured tanks worth Rs 20-30 crore in the two Azerbaijan-Armenia wars in 2017 and 2020.

He is now director general of the Indian Space Association, the industry body of the space sector.

Bhatt said the space sector is critical to future warfare as satellites play an important role in intelligence gathering, surveillance and reconnaissance, besides guiding missiles and aircraft to their desired targets.

Bhatt said several countries have demonstrated anti-satellite weapons and were also developing suicidal satellites that go near an adversary's satellites and destroy it.

He said India has nine or 10 military satellites for surveillance purposes and has plans to put in place a constellation of 52 satellites for space-based surveillance.

He said the Pahalgam attack was seen in strategic circles as an attempt by the Pakistan Army to stay relevant in their country after a series of setbacks, including the attack on the Pakistan corps commander residence in 2023 by supporters of former prime minister Imran Khan.

Bhatt said India has drawn a new red line for dealing with Pakistan by warning them of a strong response to every act of terror on Indian soil.

Bhatt said the keeping in abeyance of the Indus Water Treaty has been a very effective method. Another method, he added, was for India to keep focusing on its growth story while keeping an eye on Pakistan's activities.

– PTI

SALAR سالار

Why dating apps are falling out of favour

Dating apps have transformed how people meet romantic partners. But they seem to be falling out of favour.

Data shows that last year, four of the biggest dating apps in the UK lost over a million users between them. And research my colleague and I worked on suggested that this is because people have become frustrated and bored with digital matchmaking.

The frustration is usually the result of inconsiderate behaviour from other app users. And the boredom appears to stem from a growing belief that the AI used by these apps seems to prioritise short-term engagement metrics over meaningful connections.

This marks a significant shift from earlier online dating websites, which were notably more transparent about how they tried to establish authentic connections. Often this was through detailed answers to compatibility quizzes or personality assessments.

For example, OkCupid.com, founded in 2004, asked users a wide range of multiple-choice questions. It then went further by also asking them to specify the responses to those same questions they wanted to see from prospective partners.

In contrast, today's dating apps increasingly rely on less transparent AI which seems to be based on simplistic engagement metrics rather than a path to genuine compatibility.

The result is often a selection of vague, fleeting connections that do not amount to meaningful relationships. And the business model of today's dating apps – selling increased visibility and access to matches – creates a challenging environment for many users to find the matches they want.

Because of this, many users experience a sense of dissatisfaction which manifests itself in four stages.

It begins with what I call a "boredom cycle". General boredom prompts many daters to use the app in the first place, but resulting conversations often turn into uninspired and lacklustre exchanges. This adds to the boredom, which then spreads and grows throughout the entire dating app network. After that is a general sense of disappointment, as users become jaded from regular "ghosting", "flaking", and mundane message exchanges which don't lead to actual dates.

This all leads to a third stage of "algorithmic cynicism". At this point, users become increasingly sceptical of dating app algorithms, suspecting that their primary function is to encourage the purchase of certain features rather than to establish authentic connections.

Finally, communication fatigue kicks in. Users go through the motions of swiping and texting with a sense that there are no better alternatives. It all becomes a somewhat hollow experience which ultimately drives many away from the platforms completely.

Research has also shown that the initial rise of online dating usage among millennials coincided with early enthusiasm about social media. But this enthusiasm has diminished.

In related research on human-AI joint decision-making, my colleagues and I found that when people interact with an imperfect AI system, but also receive clear feedback about the their own behaviour patterns and how the AI responds, they can help to correct errors.

That research focused on financial decisions, but dating apps could do a similar thing by openly providing daters with personalised insights about how AI algorithms are responding to their activity. This is something that no dating app currently does.

Instead, they let users adjust certain filters, such as age, location and ethnicity. But then they use AI to create "revealed preferences" based on people's patterns of engagement with the app, like swiping and messaging. These "revealed preferences" seem to greatly influence the kinds of profiles that the dating apps' AI recommends.

Indeed, our research shows that a cynical view of dating app algorithms is a key reason why something as potentially exciting as finding a romantic partner can become so dreadfully boring.

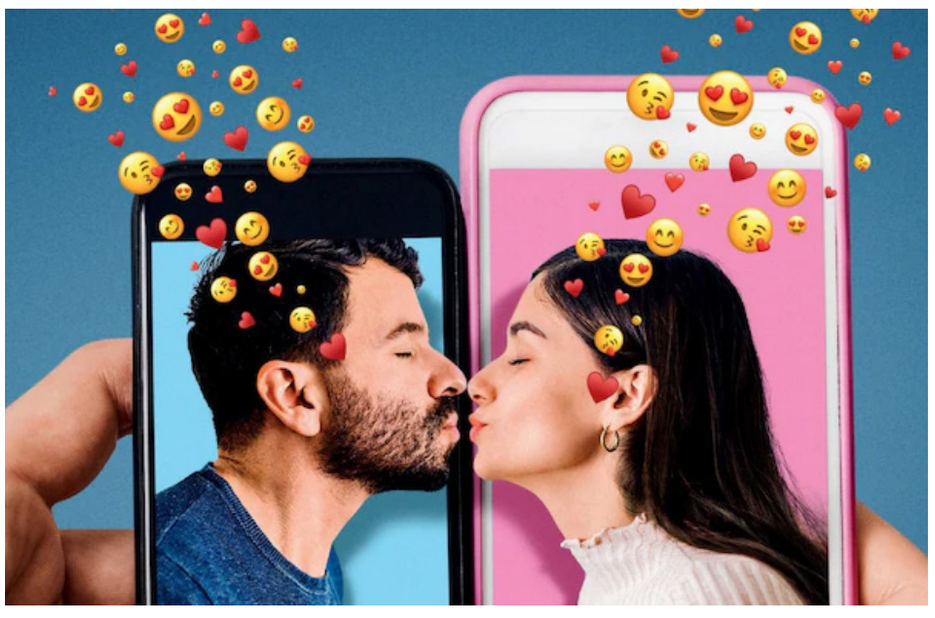
Addressing this issue, by simply explaining to daters how AI interprets their use of the app could be a valuable selling point. Giving users freedom to adjust other filters besides demographics, such as those related to their values and interests, could further increase interest.

This would represent a return to the more transparent match-making principles of earlier dating websites, but with the benefits of the latest technology.

Our research suggests that as dating app users grow ever more discerning, they will demand greater transparency and an improved overall dating app experience. The industry's future may ultimately depend on whether companies can shift focus from impersonal engagement metrics to fostering authentic connections.

And platforms which embrace transparency and empower users could make many fall in love with dating apps all over again.

– PTI



Dating apps lose spark as users crave real, transparent connections ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Territorial concessions key in Ukraine-Russia talks

If the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, meet in Istanbul on 15 May, territory – and who controls it – will be high on their agenda.

Putin offered to start direct talks between Russia and Ukraine at a press conference on 11 May. Donald Trump pushed Zelensky to accept this offer in a social media post, saying that "Ukraine should agree to this, IMMEDIATELY."

The Ukrainian President, still buoyed by a meeting with the British, French, German and Polish leaders that called for an unconditional 30-day ceasefire, agreed shortly afterwards.

Russia has said it wants to focus on the Istanbul communique of March 2022 and a subsequent draft agreement that was negotiated, but never adopted, by the two sides in April 2022. These 2022 negotiations focused on Ukraine becoming a permanently neutral state and on which nations would provide security guarantees for any deal. They also relegated discussions over Crimea to separate negotiations with a ten-to-15-year timeframe.

Russia uses the phrase "the current situation on the ground" as thinly disguised code for territorial questions that have become more contentious over the past three years. This relates to Russian gains on the battlefield and the illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions in September 2022.

Russia's position, as articulated recently by the country's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, is that "the international recognition of Crimea, Sevastopol, the DPR, the LPR, the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions as part of Russia is … imperative".This is clearly a non-starter for Ukraine, as repeatedly stated by Zelensky. There could, however, be some flexibility on accepting that some parts of sovereign Ukrainian territory are under temporary Russian control. This has been suggested by both Trump's Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, and Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko.

The territories that Russia currently occupies, and claims, in Ukraine have varying strategic, economic and symbolic value for Moscow and Kyiv. The areas with the greatest strategic value include Crimea and the territories on the shores of the Azov Sea, which provide Russia with a land corridor to Crimea.

The international recognition of Crimea as part of Russia, as apparently suggested under the terms of an agreement hashed out by Putin and Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff, could expand the areas of the Black Sea that Russia can claim to legally control.

Zelensky and Putin eye Istanbul peace talks, but territorial disputes remain the core impasse ***PHOTO: PTI***

This could then be used by the Kremlin as a launchpad for renewed attacks on Ukraine and to threaten Nato's eastern maritime flank in Romania and Bulgaria. Any permanent recognition of Russia's control of these territories is, therefore, unacceptable to Ukraine and its European partners. They also include Europe's largest nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia and a large labour force among their estimated population of between 4.5 million to 5.5 million people who will be critical to Ukraine's post-war reconstruction. Beyond the strategic and economic value of the illegally occupied territories, the symbolism that both sides attach to their control is the most significant obstacle to any deal, given how irreconcilable Moscow's and Kyiv's positions are. For both sides, control of these territories, or loss thereof, is what defines victory or defeat in the war.

As a result, the Ukrainian leadership has become hostage to its own information strategy, which has placed the "return of all territories" at the top of the criteria for victory. Apart from the potential domestic fall-out from any territorial compromises that Ukraine may be forced to make, there is another reason why the territorial question has become so intractable.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine was not a war over territory as such, but was part of Moscow's agenda to restore the sphere of influence that it lost at the end of the cold war.

The strategy of both Moscow and Washington to focus on territorial consequences may lead to a ceasefire. But it will not address the fundamental issue of how to deal with a vengeful and revisionist autocracy on Europe's doorsteps.

– THE CONVERSATION

PUTIN NO-SHOW MARS PEACE TALKS

Miffed, Zelenskyy flies out to Albania to discuss war situation with 47 European leaders

Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama, left welcomes President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the 6th European Political Community (EPC)

ISTANBUL/TIRANA
16 MAY

Russia and Ukraine are due to hold their first direct peace talks in three years Friday, gathering in Istanbul for Turkish-brokered negotiations, but officials and observers expect them to yield little immediate progress on stopping the more than 3-year war.

A Ukrainian delegation led by Defence Minister Rustem Umerov was due to meet with a low-level Russian team headed by Presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky.

The latest efforts got off to a rocky start on Thursday, when Russian President Vladimir Putin spurned an offer by his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy to meet face-to-face. Delegations from the two countries also flew to different Turkish cities and put together teams of significantly different diplomatic heft for possible talks.

A Ukrainian delegation was due to meet with a Russian team

Ukrainian officials held an early-morning meeting with national security advisers from the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom to coordinate positions, a senior Ukrainian official said.

A three-way meeting between Turkey, US and Ukraine also took place, Turkish Foreign Ministry officials said. The US side included Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Rubio on Thursday said he didn't foresee major developments in Istanbul.

Zelenskyy, meantime, flew to Albania to attend a meeting Friday of the leaders of 47 European countries to discuss security, defense and democratic standards against the backdrop of the war.

The theme of the European Political Community, or EPC, summit in Tirana is "New Europe in a new world: unity – cooperation – joint action."

The gathering will also address ways to improve the continent's competitiveness and tackle unauthorised migration.

"As Russia's war against Ukraine continues, its consequences stretch far beyond Ukraine's borders," Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and European Council President António Costa wrote in their EPC summit invitation letter.

Meanwhile, Russia and Ukraine agreed on Friday to exchange 1,000 prisoners of war each, the head of Russia's delegation Vladimir Medinsky said. Medinsky also said Moscow and Kyiv agreed to provide each other with detailed proposals for a ceasefire. *—PTI*

NJ railmen's strike strands three lakh passengers

NEW JERSEY, 16 MAY

Train engineers at New Jersey Transit began a strike on Friday, disrupting travel for around 350,000 commuters across New Jersey and New York City. It follows a breakdown in pay negotiations with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, marking the first transit strike in over 40 years. The union rejected the latest offer, demanding average annual salaries of Rs 135,000, while NJ Transit claims current average pay is already Rs 107,000. Limited replacement bus services will begin Monday but can only handle 20 per cent of usual rail passengers. NJ Transit CEO Kris Kolluri remains open to talks, while Governor Phil Murphy urges a deal that is fair yet financially sustainable. Federal mediation may resume Sunday. *—PTI*

Australia's star veteran loses defamation case

MELBOURNE, 16 MAY

Australia's most decorated living war veteran, Ben Roberts-Smith, has lost his appeal against a civil court ruling that found he unlawfully killed four unarmed Afghans. Three Federal Court judges unanimously upheld a 2023 decision that media reports accusing him of war crimes were substantially true. Roberts-Smith, who denies the allegations, intends to appeal to the High Court. Journalist Nick McKenzie, who was sued, called for prosecution. Only one veteran, Oliver Schulz, faces criminal charges for allegedly killing an unarmed Afghan. Critics note whistleblower David McBride remains the only person jailed over such allegations. Some former colleagues have urged Roberts-Smith be stripped of his Victoria Cross, Australia's highest military honour. *—PTI*

Woman accuses Cannes executive of sexual assault

CANNES, 16 MAY

A vice president of one of the parallel film events of the Cannes Film Festival was mired in a controversy on Thursday after being publicly denounced for sexual violence, reports said. During a roundtable discussion about sexual assault organised by France's film board, a woman stood up and publicly denounced an executive from the ACID Cannes film section. "The young woman acted with great courage and was immediately taken care of by charities present," said Erwan Balanant, a French MP who was in the room. It came as the main Cannes Festival barred French actor Theo Navarro-Mussy from the premiere on Thursday of a film because he was accused of rape by three former partners. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: X/PopFusionHQ

Singer Chris Brown booked for London nightclub assault

LONDON, 16 MAY

Grammy-winning singer Chris Brown was charged in England on Thursday over an alleged assault on a music producer at a London nightclub in 2023, prosecutors confirmed. The 36-year-old was arrested at a Manchester hotel and faces one count of causing grievous bodily harm. Producer Abe Diaw claims he was hospitalised after Brown allegedly attacked him without provocation at the Tape nightclub in Mayfair in February 2023, while Brown was touring the UK. The Sun reported the incident and alerted police when Brown was spotted in the country. Brown is due to appear at Manchester Magistrates' Court on Friday morning. The singer won Grammys for his albums 'F.A.M.E. and '11:11' (Deluxe) and is set to start an international tour next month, beginning in Europe. *—PTI*

China using schools for cultural genocide: Study

For centuries, the Uyghur people have preserved a unique cultural and ethnic identity **PHOTO: X @UN_SPEXPERTS**

WASHINGTON, 16 MAY

The Centre for Uyghur Studies (CUS) has published a new report entitled "Breaking the Roots: China's Use of Boarding Schools as a Tool of Genocide Against Uyghur Muslims." The report highlights one of the most concerning and overlooked facets of China's oppressive measures against the Uyghur population: the state-sponsored boarding school system specifically aimed at Uyghur children in East Turkistan also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The report provides a thorough analysis of how the boarding school system functions as a tool of cultural genocide within the Uyghur homeland, tracing the origins of China's assimilation efforts against the Uyghurs, including how narratives of "counter-terrorism" have been employed to legitimise oppressive policies following the events of 9/11.

For centuries, the Uyghur people have preserved a unique cultural and ethnic identity. Nevertheless, under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party, their very existence is jeopardised through systematic initiatives, and now, the extensive adoption of coercive boarding schools, according to the CUS. *—ANI*

US tariff war squeezes Japan's economy

TOKYO, 16 MAY

The Japanese economy contracted at an annual rate of 0.7 per cent in the first quarter, according to government data released on Friday, as US President Donald Trump's trade war hurt exports and dented consumer confidence.

Japan's real gross domestic product, or the measure of a nation's goods and services, shrank at a greater-than-expected 0.2 per cent in January–March compared to the previous quarter in the first contraction in a year, data revealed.

Exports declined at an annual rate of 2.3 per cent. Consumer spending remained flat, while capital investment grew 5.8 per cent.

Trump's tariffs are likely to hurt Japan's giant exporters, especially the automakers, not only for products shipped from Japan, but from other nations, like Mexico and Canada. Officials acknowledge planning a response is a challenge because Trump keeps changing his mind.

The United Nations forecasted slower global economic growth this year and next, pointing to the impact of the surge in US tariffs, increasing trade tensions, volatile geopolitical landscape and threats of rising production costs, supply chain disruptions and financial turbulence. *—PTI*

Trump wraps up Mideast tour with $200B trade deals

ABU DHABI, 16 MAY

US President Donald Trump wrapped up a Mideast tour in the United Arab Emirates, announcing an over USD 200 billion in commercial deals between the United States and Abu Dhabi – bringing the total of investment agreements in the Gulf region to over USD 2 trillion.

Trump departed after a breakfast for business leaders and a visit to an interfaith place of worship named for the Abraham Accords he negotiated. As part of the accords, the UAE and some other countries in the Middle East recognised Israel.

"(The deal) will contribute to the US boom in AI infrastructure, semiconductors, energy, quantum computing, biotechnology, and manufacturing," the White House said in a statement.

Trump also said that Iran has an American proposal over its rapidly advancing nuclear programme as negotiations between the two countries go on.

Trump's remarks represent the first time he's acknowledged an American proposal is with Tehran after multiple rounds of negotiations between US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. "They have a proposal," Trump said. "But most importantly, they know they have to move quickly, or something bad is going to happen."

Meanwhile, Trump said he's moving to set up direct talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I think it's time for us to just do it," Trump told reporters. He said he would hold the meeting "as soon as we can set it up."

"He didn't go, and I understand that," Trump said. "Five thousand young people are being killed every week on average, and we're going to get it done." *—PTI/ANI*

Israeli airstrikes kill 93 people in Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH, 16 MAY

At least 93 people were killed by Israeli strikes in Gaza on Friday as US President Donald Trump wrapped up his regional trip.

Strikes overnight hit across Gaza, including the outskirts of Deir al-Balah and the city of Khan Younis. Gaza's health ministry said hundreds more were injured in addition to those killed.

The widespread attacks come as Trump finishes his visit to Gulf states but not Israel. There had been widespread hope that his regional trip could usher in a ceasefire deal or renewal of humanitarian aid to Gaza. An Israeli blockade of the territory is now in its third month.

Displaced Palestinians fleeing Beit Lahia amid ongoing Israeli military operations in Jabalia on Friday **PHOTO: X @UN_SPEXPERTS**

Speaking to reporters at a business forum in Abu Dhabi on the final day of his trip, Trump said he was looking to resolve a range of global crises, including Gaza. "We're looking at Gaza," he said. "And we've got to get that taken care of. A lot of people are starving. A lot of people are — there's a lot of bad things going on." *—PTI*

Ex-FBI Director under probe for '8647' post

Washington, 16 May

The United States Secret Service has launched an investigation into former FBI Director James Comey following allegations that he incited violence against President Donald Trump in a now-deleted Instagram post, according to a report by The New York Post. Dismissed by Trump during his first term in office, he had shared a photo of seashells arranged to "8647", a slang for getting rid of something. *—ANI*

Etihad Airways says it is buying Boeing aircraft

Abu Dhabi, 16 May

Etihad Airways said on Friday it would purchase 28 wide-body Boeing aircraft. Etihad is the government-owned airline of Abu Dhabi that also flies East-West routes like Emirates, the long-haul carrier in neighbouring Dubai. Etihad said in a statement that the sale included "a mix of Boeing 787 and 777X aircraft, powered by GE engines and supported by a services package." *—PTI/ANI*

FBI disbanding corruption squad

Washington, 15 May

The FBI is disbanding a Washington-based squad that investigates allegations of fraud and public corruption against members of Congress and other federal officials, sources said on Thursday. The move is part of a broader reorganisation of the FBI's Washington field office, said one FBI official familiar with the plans. It was not immediately clear where the agents on the squad might be reassigned. *—PTI*

HK RAISES ALARM

Fresh Covid wave spreading across Asia, warns report

HONG KONG/BEIJING/ BANGKOK/SINGAPORE
16 MAY

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Covid-19 appears to be resurging in parts of Asia, Bloomberg reported. Health authorities in densely populated financial hubs of Hong Kong and Singapore are raising alarms as Covid-19 infections surge sharply.

China and Thailand are also seeing a jump in cases. China is approaching the levels seen during last summer's peak, while Thailand reported two clusters outbreaks after the Songkran festival held in April.

The virus' activity in Hong Kong is now "quite high," Albert Au, head of the Communicable Disease Branch of the city's Centre for Health Protection, told local media this week. The percentage of respiratory samples testing Covid-positive in Hong Kong recently reached its highest in a year.

Severe cases - including deaths - also reached its highest level in about a year to 31 in the week through 3 May, the centre's data shows. While the resurgence is yet to match the infection peaks seen in the past two years, rising viral load found in sewage water and Covid-related medical consultations and hospitalisation suggest the virus is actively spreading to the city's 7 million people.

In Singapore meanwhile, the health ministry released its first update on infection numbers in almost a year this month, as the estimated number of cases jumped 28 per cent to 14,200 in the week through 3 May from the previous seven days. Daily hospitalisation rose around 30 per cent.

In China, test positivity rates in hospitals more than doubled over the five weeks leading up to 4 May, according to the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. *—Agencies*

MAN–WOMAN UNION CORE OF FAMILY: POPE

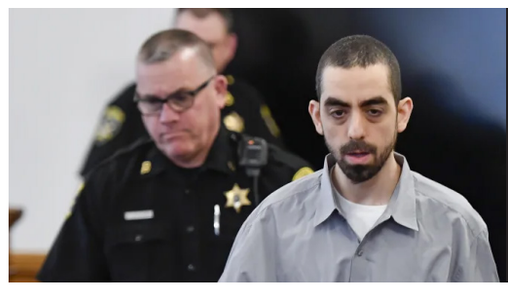
VATICAN CITY, 16 MAY

Pope Leo XIV affirmed on Friday that the family is founded on the "stable union between a man and a woman," and that the unborn and elderly enjoy dignity as God's creatures, articulating clear Catholic teaching on marriage and abortion at the start of his pontificate.

Leo, the first American pope, also called for reviving multilateral diplomacy and promoting dialogue between religions in the search for peace, in his first meeting with the Vatican diplomatic corps.

The encounter is one of the protocol requirements after a conclave, allowing a new pope to greet representatives of world governments ahead of his formal installation Mass this Sunday.

The Holy See is a sovereign state under international law, has diplomatic relations with over 180 countries and enjoys observer status at the United Nations. *—PTI*



Hadi Matar, right, walks into Chautauqua County court in Mayville, New York, on February 20, 2025. **PHOTO: X**

Rushdie attack convict to meet his fate today

MAYVILLE, MAY 16

The man convicted of stabbing Salman Rushdie on a New York stage in 2022, leaving the prizewinning author blind in one eye, is scheduled to be sentenced on Friday. A jury found Hadi Matar, 27, guilty of attempted murder and assault in February.

Chautauqua County District Attorney Jason Schmidt said he will request 25 years in prison for the 12 August, 2022, attack on Rushdie and seven years for injuring a second man who was with the author. The sentences must run concurrently because both victims were injured in the same event, he said.

Rushdie is not expected to return to court for his assailant's sentencing, the prosecutor said. During the trial, the 77-year-old author was the key witness, describing how he believed he was dying when a masked attacker plunged a knife into his head and body more than a dozen times as he was being introduced at the Chautauqua Institution to speak about writer safety.

Rushdie spent 17 days at a Pennsylvania hospital and more than three weeks at a New York City rehabilitation centre. *—PTI*

PHOTO:ANI

Gold climbs ₹1,400 to ₹96,450/10g

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Gold prices jumped Rs 1,400 to Rs 96,450 per 10g in the national capital on Friday due to fresh buying from jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed Rs 1,400 to Rs 96,000 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes).Gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity had closed at Rs 95,050 and Rs 94,600 per 10g, respectively, on Thursday. In addition, silver prices appreciated by Rs 1,000 to Rs 98,000 per kg on Friday (inclusive of all taxes). The metal had ended at Rs 97,000 per kg in the previous market session. Meanwhile, spot gold in the international markets declined by USD 50.85 or 1.57 per cent to USD 3,189.25 per ounce. —*PTI*

Rupee rises 1 paisa to settle at 85.53 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

Rupee rose 1 paisa to settle at 85.53 (provisional) against the greenback on Friday on the back of strong FII inflows and a marginal decline in the dollar index. Rupee's gain was curtailed due to higher Brent crude prices, negative domestic equity markets, and the government data that showed the country' trade deficit widening in April, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened strong at 85.28 and traded in the range of 85.28 to 85.70. It eventually settled at 85.53 (provisional), up 1 paisa from its previous close. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.12 per cent at 100.75. —*PTI*

Govt's wheat procurement reaches 28.66MT

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The government's wheat procurement has surpassed last year's level and reached 28.66 million tonne so far in the current 2025-26 marketing year, according to official data. The procurement is the highest since the 2022-23 marketing year, driven by projections of a record wheat output of 115.3 million tonne this year. Total wheat purchase stood at 26.59 million tonne in the 2024-25 marketing year. While the wheat marketing year runs from April to March, the bulk of procurement occurs in the first three months. Food Corporation of India (FCI) data shows all five major wheat procuring states - Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh - have procured more wheat in the current year compared to last year. —*PTI*

Belrise Industries IPO to open on 21 May

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Automotive component manufacturer Belrise Industries has announced a price band of Rs 85-90 per share for its Rs 2,150 crore Initial Public Offering (IPO). The share sale will be available for public subscription from 21 to 23 May, with bidding for anchor investors starting on 20 May. This IPO is solely a fresh issue of equity shares, with no Offer For Sale component. The company plans to utilise Rs 1,618 crore of the proceeds to pay down debt, which totalled nearly Rs 2,600 crore as of December 2024. A significant portion of the issue has been reserved for institutional investors. Belrise operates 17 manufacturing facilities across India and has established relationships with major global OEMs, driving a 13.7 per cent increase in revenue for the financial year 2024. —*PTI*

Singtel offloads 1.2% stake in Airtel for ₹124.95 crore

Majority of transactions were sold to domestic mutual funds

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Singtel on Friday said it has sold about 1.2 per cent of its direct stake in Bharti Airtel for Rs 124.95 crore in sync with its active capital management approach to optimise its asset portfolio and drive shareholder returns sustainably.

The transaction was executed via a private placement to international and Indian institutional investors, including existing shareholders of Airtel, Singtel said.

The private placement drew strong interest from existing shareholders and new investors and was well oversubscribed, resulting in both an increase in transaction size as well as tighter final pricing than initial guidance.

A large majority of the transactions were sold to domestic mutual funds and international long-only funds.

"Singtel has sold approximately 1.2 per cent of its direct stake in regional associate Airtel today for SGD 2.0 billion as part of its active capital management approach to optimise its asset portfolio and drive shareholder returns sustainably," Singtel said in its statement.

A long-term strategic investor in Airtel for over two decades, Singtel said it has been working with Bharti Enterprises to equalise its effective stake in Airtel in the medium term, according to the company.

Post the transaction, Singtel will hold a 28.3 per cent stake in Airtel, valued at an estimated SGD 48 billion, and generate an estimated gain of SGD 1.4 billion. —*PTI*

- The private placement drew strong interest from existing shareholders and new investors and was well oversubscribed, resulting in both an increase in transaction size as well as tighter final pricing than initial guidance

SLIDE AFTER SURGE

Mkts end lower on profit-taking in IT shares

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Friday due to profit-taking in IT shares and Bharti Airtel after a sharp rally in the previous session.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 200.15 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at 82,330.59. During the day, it lost 383.79 points or 0.46 per cent to 82,146.95.

The NSE Nifty dropped 42.30 points or 0.17 per cent to 25,019.80.

Bharti Airtel dropped by 2.81 per cent after Singtel sold about 1.2 per cent of its direct stake in the firm for around USD 1.5 billion in sync with its active capital management approach to optimise its asset portfolio and drive shareholder returns sustainably.

HCL Tech, State Bank of India, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Bajaj Finserv, Larsen & Toubro, Mahindra & Mahindra and Titan were also among the losers in the Sensex pack. Eternal, Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints, ITC, Tata Motors and NTPC were among the gainers. The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.18 per cent and midcap index climbed 0.85 per cent. Among sectoral indices, industrials surged the most by 1.80 per cent, followed by realty, capital goods, utilities, power and consumer discretionary. —*PTI*

INDUSIND BANK SHARES DROP 6%

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Shares of IndusInd Bank on Friday dropped nearly six per cent after the firm said its Internal Audit Department (IAD) has found "unsubstantiated balances" of Rs 595 crore in "other assets" of its balance sheet, and has also examined the roles of key employees in this lapse.

The stock tanked 5.68 per cent to Rs 735.95 on the BSE.

At the NSE, shares of the firm dropped 3.90 per cent to Rs 750.

In a regulatory filing on Thursday, IndusInd Bank said this balance was, later in January 2025, set off against corresponding balances appearing in "other liabilities" accounts. —*PTI*

India's merchandise exports surge over 50%: Govt data

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

PHOTO:CHATGPT

India's merchandise exports for the fiscal year 2024-25 reached USD 437.42 billion, with agriculture, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and engineering goods contributing over 50% of this total, according to government data. Engineering goods led the charge with a substantial 26.67 per cent share, followed by agriculture at 11.85 per cent, pharmaceuticals at 6.96 per cent, and electronics at 8.82 percent .

The electronics sector experienced remarkable growth, with exports soaring by 32.46 per cent to USD 38.58 billion, compared to USD 29.12 billion the previous year. Notably, computer hardware and peripherals doubled their export value to USD 1.4 billion. The primary markets for electronic exports included the UAE, the US, and the UK.

Engineering goods also saw a steady rise, with shipments increasing 6.74 per cent year-on-year to USD 116.67 billion, while drugs and pharmaceuticals exports grew by 9.4 per cent to USD 30.47 billion. The agricultural sector reported robust performance as well, with key commodities like rice, spices, and coffee achieving significant export gains.

India's rice exports reached an all-time high of USD 12.5 billion, reinforcing the country's position as the world's leading rice exporter with a nearly 40 per cent market share. Key destinations for rice included Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE.

With a diverse product range and expanding global markets, India's export landscape continues to flourish, bolstered by government initiatives aimed at enhancing manufacturing and value-added exports. —*PTI*

IIFT gets govt nod for 1st offshore campus in Dubai

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Union government has approved a proposal by the commerce ministry's Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) to set up its first offshore campus in Dubai, a statement said on Friday.

The institute has received approvals from Ministry of Education, along with no-objection certificates from ministries of Home Affairs and External Affairs, as well as University Grants Commission, the IIFT said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday, "this truly reflects the spirit of the National Education Policy 2020, marking a new chapter in the internationalisation of Indian education and its growing role in shaping thought leadership globally". Before starting the campus, the institute will obtain necessary permission from the UAE.

According to Ministry of Education, there shall be no diversion of faculty or any academic infrastructure from the existing campus of IIFT, New Delhi or its constituent units. —*PTI*

PHOTO:CHATGPT

Summer travel pushes petrol sales by 10%

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Petrol consumption in India saw a significant increase of approximately 10 per cent in the first half of May, driven by summer travel, according to provisional sales data from state-owned fuel retailers. Petrol sales surged to 1.5 million tonnes between May 1-15, up from 1.37 million tonnes during the same period last year, marking a 10.5 per cent rise from 1.36 million tonnes in May 2023 and nearly 46 per cent higher than the depressed levels of May 2021.

Diesel sales also saw a modest uptick of 2 per cent, reaching 3.36 million tonnes, with growth supported by rising demand linked to agriculture and transportation. Although diesel's growth has been slow in recent months, it reflected a 4 per cent increase from the previous year.

Conversely, jet fuel (ATF) consumption grew at a slower rate, up just 1.1 per cent to 327,900 tonnes this month, hampered by flight restrictions in parts of northern and western India. Meanwhile, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) sales continued to rise, jumping 10.4 per cent to 1.34 million tonnes, driven by the Ujjwala programme, demonstrating robust growth over previous years. — *PTI*

OYO records 20% growth with 3,500 new clients

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

PHOTO:X

Global travel tech platform OYO on Friday said its business accelerator division added 3,500 new corporate clients in FY25, recording 20 per cent growth year-on-year.

The growth in the company's corporate portfolio indicates a rebound in business travel in India post-Covid.

OYO now has a network of over 6,500 corporate clients with this addition.

Mumbai emerged as the top-performing market, adding over 700 new corporate clients in the past year, followed by Hyderabad with 400, and Pune with 350.

Other major metro cities, including Chennai and Bengaluru, also played a key role in the surge in corporate accounts.

OYO has also recorded a surge in long stays and event-based stays with the corporate clients.

According to the latest Business Travel Index (BTI) released by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), India has emerged as the 4th largest business travel market in the Asia-Pacific region, driven by a robust economy and surge in demand for face-to-face meetings, signalling a revival of business travel across sectors.

Additionally, the rapid expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the country is playing a pivotal role in fuelling regional travel demand. —*PTI*

- Mumbai emerged as the top-performing market, adding over 700 new corporate clients in the past year, followed by Hyderabad with 400, and Pune with 350.

India-UK FTA to boost exporters' margin: Report

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is expected to strengthen India's textile exports, improve margins for existing and emerging textile exporters, according to a report by Systematix Research.

The report stated that the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is set to strengthen the export pipeline, improve margins, and drive scale for India's existing and emerging textile exporters catering to the UK markets.

It said "The FTA is set to strengthen the export pipeline, improve margins, and drive scale for India's existing and emerging textile exporters catering to the UK markets; the full impact would be felt by FY27".

The full impact of this agreement is expected to be felt by FY27, as Indian textile companies gradually gain stronger access and price competitiveness in the UK market.

Merchandise trade between India and the UK increased at a CAGR of 1 per cent between 2014–15 and 2023–24, with imports increasing at a CAGR of six per cent compared to exports at a CAGR of 4 per cent.

The trade surplus has increased marginally to USD 4.5 billion in 2023-24 from USD 4.3 billion in 2014-15.

UK's share in the total Indian merchandise imports was 1 per cent for the past decade, whereas its share in the total Indian merchandise exports was 3 per cent for the past decade. —*ANI*

FASTEST-GROWING ECONOMY

India's GDP growth revised to 6.3% for 2025: UN

UNITED NATIONS, 16 MAY

PHOTO:FREEPIK

India's economic growth forecast for 2025 has been revised downward to 6.3 per cent, and despite a projected moderation, the country remains one of the fastest-growing large economies, supported by resilient consumption and government spending, the United Nations (UN) has said.

The UN on Thursday launched a report titled "The World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2025".

The report said the global economy is at a precarious juncture, marked by heightened trade tensions and elevated policy uncertainty. The recent surge in tariffs—driving the effective US tariff rate up steeply—threatens to raise production costs, disrupt global supply chains and amplify financial turbulence.

The report said that despite a projected moderation, India remains one of the fastest-growing large economies, supported by resilient consumption and government spending.

India's economy is forecast to grow by 6.3 per cent in 2025, down from 7.1 per cent in 2024.

"Resilient private consumption and strong public investment, alongside robust services exports, will support economic growth," the report said.

The 6.3 per cent growth projection for India in 2025 is slightly lower than the 6.6 per cent estimated in the UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025 published in January this year.

In India, unemployment remains largely stable amid steady economic conditions, though persistent gender disparities in employment underscore the need for greater inclusivity in workforce participation. The report added that in India, inflation is projected to slow from 4.9 per cent in 2024 to 4.3 per cent in 2025, staying within the central bank's target range. —*PTI*

- The report said the global economy is at a precarious juncture, marked by heightened trade tensions and elevated policy uncertainty. The recent surge in tariffs—driving the effective US tariff rate up steeply—threatens to raise production costs, disrupt global supply chains and amplify financial turbulence

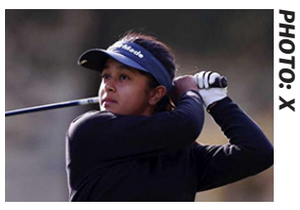


PHOTO: X

Zara finishes creditable 7th at Queen Sirikit Cup

MIYAZAKI, 16 MAY

Young golfer Zara Anand put up a solid and consistent show through the week to finish sole seventh, helping India seal a fifth-place finish at the Queen Sirikit Cup, here. The young star, who shot 73-71-72 on the first three days, carded her best round of the week, a 2-under 70 in the final round at the acclaimed Tom Watson Golf Course at the Phoenix Seagaia Resort. It helped her finish at 2-under 286 in sole seventh place. Zara was one of the only eight players who had an under-par total over the days. Zara's efforts helped India finish in the top 5 of the event as Mannat Brar (77-70-78-72) at 9-over 297 was T-19 and Heena Kang (76-78-70-74) at 10-over was T-21st.—*PTI*

UTT's sixth season kicks off on 31 May, final is on 15 June

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The sixth season of Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) will begin at the EKA Arena in Ahmedabad with a double-header including a match between defending champions Dempo Goa Challengers and home team Ahmedabad SG Pipers. Earlier in the evening, Season 2 winners Dabang Delhi TTC will face Sreeja Akula-led Jaipur Patriots in the opener. Eight franchises will compete across 23 ties with the finale set for 15 June. U Mumba TT, led by world No. 14 Bernadette Szocs and rising Indian star Yashaswini Ghorpade, begin their season with a Maharashtra Derby on 1 June against PBG Pune Jaguars, spearheaded by Spanish ace Alvaro Robles.—*PTI*

Faizan to fight for WBA Asia Middle East title

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Indian professional boxer Faizan Anwar will take on Ghana's Kpakpo Allotey in the WBA Asia Middle East's super lightweight title fight in the Super Fighter Series at the Sunburn Union here on Sunday. The fight night will feature 10 action-packed bouts, including four international match-ups and two WBA Asia Middle East title clashes. Ukraine's Danylo Honcharuk will take on Ruslan Kamilov of Dagestan in the co-main event, while the Belarusian sensation Aleksandra Sitnikova will cross swords with India's Rani Devi in the women's bout.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

LA 2028 Olympics plans air taxi service for spectators

LOS ANGELES, 16 MAY

Fans and VIPs can fly their way to venues at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics with the first air taxis ever to be used at the games. Archer Aviation's piloted electric air taxi, known as Midnight, will ferry up to four passengers from a vertiport takeoff and landing hub near a major venue about 10 to 20 minutes to their destination within the company's Los Angeles network. The planned network includes vertiports at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood and the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum south of downtown, which are slated to share opening and closing ceremonies. Other locations are Los Angeles International Airport.—*PTI*

RCB vs KKR: Virat's outing in focus as IPL resumes

RCB are second on the table with 16 points from 11 matches

KKR VS RCB

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	35
KKR Won:	20
RCB Won:	15

KKR vs RCB Match starts at **7.30 pm IST**

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Brought to a halt by the recent India-Pakistan border tensions, the IPL will resume on Saturday with Royal Challengers Bengaluru taking on Kolkata Knight Riders in a high-stakes contest where the spotlight will firmly be on Virat Kohli following his recent Test retirement.

The unexpected 10-day break has left both the RCB and the KKR with different goals to achieve and common challenges to hurdle. The RCB are second on the table with 16 points from 11 matches, and a win here can propel them to the playoffs.

KKR are sixth on the table with 11 points from 12 games, and a slip-up will evaporate the defending champions' hopes of making the knockouts. They are also faced with the challenge of hitting the pre-break intensity straightaway at the Chinnaswamy stadium. The hosts are coming off a four-match winning streak, while the tourists have managed to stitch two victories in three matches before the league went to a grinding halt. Questions remain on whether they can regain that competitive edge after a period of uncertainty. But RCB are better-placed to surmount these difficulties, and the sight of skipper Rajat Patidar batting rather fluently at the nets might have soothed a lot of nerves. Patidar had injured his finger during the home match against Chennai Super Kings, forcing him to wear a splint.

> **It was an evening marked by confusion, chaos, rumours, and a lack of clarity for the RCB players and staff**
>
> -Mo Babat, Director of Cricket, RCB

Virat Kohli

Worries for KKR

Batting has been KKR's Achilles Heel this season as, apart from captain Ajinkya Rahane and young Angkrish Raghuvanshi, none of their batters have managed to contribute consistently. They would like a few more runs from the bats of Venkatesh Iyer, Andre Russell, and Rinku Singh. However, the KKR bowling line-up of Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, and Harshit Rana has held its own despite being on the expensive side on occasions. But they will be deprived of the presence of experienced England all-rounder Moeen Ali, who has been ruled out of the IPL with viral fever, if the pitch here has retained its grip seen during the previous matches. —*PTI*

BLOW FOR DELHI CAPITALS

Starc decides against returning for remainder of IPL

MELBOURNE, 16 MAY

Mitchell Starc

Australian speedster Mitchell Starc has reportedly decided against returning to India for the remainder of the IPL, dealing a blow to his team, Delhi Capitals' prospects of reaching the playoffs.

According to the 'Australian Associated Press', Starc has told the franchise that he wouldn't be rejoining the team a week after being part of the match in Dharamsala that was called off due to security reasons following air raid alerts in nearby areas.

The league was suspended the next day due to a military showdown between India and Pakistan, only for the BCCI to announce a resumption of the event from 17 May after getting necessary clearances from the government following a ceasefire.

An integral part of the Delhi Capitals setup, Starc is the team's highest wicket-taker so far this season with 14 scalps in 11 matches at 26.14, and his absence will be felt in their upcoming matches as they seek to enter the playoffs.

Starc's wife and Australia women's team captain Alyssa Healy recently shared a gripping account of the night of "complete madness" when the IPL match between Punjab Kings and Delhi Capitals was called off midway in Dharamsala. "A couple of the light towers went out, and we were just there waiting. I heard a rumour a couple of seats down that we might have to evacuate the stadium —*PTI*

> **It is not wise for overseas players to return for the remainder of the IPL, and I urge them to prioritise safety**
>
> -Mitchell Johnson, Australian speed merchant

MUDGATE MADNESS: XANDER AND SCOTTIE'S FIERY FRUSTRATIONS EXPLODE

CHARLOTTE, 16 MAY

The PGA Championship put the top three players in the world together for the first time in three years on Thursday, and the conversation turned to mud.

Scottie Scheffler and Xander Schauffele each had clumps of mud on their golf balls from the middle of the 16th fairway the hardest hole at Quail Hollow and saw their shots curve hard to the left, over the green and into the water, leading to double bogeys. It was like that for most of the day, the product on a course that has been soaked by heavy showers in the three days leading up to the second major of the year, and more rain from late last week. The PGA of America put out a notice on the eve of the first round saying that the ball would be played as it lies because the turf was "outstanding and drying by the hour."

Bhatia tied-29th at PGA C'ship; Theegala pulls out

Indo-British golfer Aaron Rai did well to shoot 4-under 67 to be placed tied fourth with European Ryder Cup captain Luke Donald after the opening round of the PGA Championship here. Indian origin, Sahith Theegala, pulled out on the eve of the Championship due to a strained neck. American player of Indian origin Akshay Bhatia carded 1-under 70 to be tied-29th. Another US player of All three Indian origin players had played the Tour Championship last year and were in the top 30. —*PTI*

Balaji and Reyes-Varela bow out of Bordeaux Challenger

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

India's N Sriram Balaji and his Mexican partner Miguel Reyes-Varela crashed out of the Challenger event in Bordeaux on Friday following a straight sets defeat against third seeds Rafael Matos and Marcelo Melo.

The unseeded Indo-Mexican combine lost the quarterfinal 2-6 4-6 to the Brazilians in under a hour to bow out from the tournament.In the singles draw, Sumit Nagal had already exited from the event following a 3-6, 4-6 defeat against seventh seed local favourite Hugo Gaston.

India's challenge is still alive in the clay court tournament with second seed Yuki Bhamabri and his American partner Robert Galloway moving to the quarterfinals. —*PTI*

ITALIAN OPEN 2025

Carlos Alcaraz fights past Musetti, secures Rome final

Carlos Alcaraz

ROME, 16 MAY

Carlos Alcaraz proved his composure and grit once more on Friday at the Internazionali BNL d'Italia in Rome, where he sealed his spot in the championship match.

The 22-year-old Spaniard earned a statement 6-3, 7-6(4) semi-final triumph over home favourite Lorenzo Musetti amid testing conditions at the ATP Masters 1000. Alcaraz tamed a mid-match rise in form from Musetti, as well as windy conditions and a boisterous Italian crowd, to surge into his 25th tour-level final.

With his two-hour, four-minute victory, Alcaraz tied Stefan Edberg for the second-most wins in their first 100 matches at the ATP Masters 1000 level (since the series' introduction in 1990). The Spaniard now boasts a 77-23 record at this level, according to the Infosys ATP Win/Loss Index, including six titles.

Musetti, competing as the ninth man to reach the last four at all three clay-court Masters 1000 events in one season, was unable to channel the raucous crowd to a memorable comeback. The 23-year-old can, however, reflect on a milestone week in Rome: With wins over former champions Daniil Medvedev and Alexander Zverev, Musetti rose one spot to No. 8 in the PIF ATP Live Rankings, securing a new career high on Monday.

After also defeating Musetti in the Monte-Carlo final last month, Alcaraz now leads their Lexus ATP Head2Head series 5-1. The Spaniard awaits a championship-match clash with World No. 1 Jannik Sinner or American Tommy Paul.

Emotional Coco Gauff sets new career high as she reaches Italian Open final

After a disappointing Spring, Coco Gauff has rounded into shape at the right time of the clay court season. Gauff has now advanced to her second consecutive clay-court final.

The fourth seed Gauff outlasted eighth seed Qinwen Zheng in the Italian Open semifinal: 7-6(3), 4-6, 7-6(4). Gauff won both tiebreaks in the marathon match, which ran just over 3.5 hours.

While the level of competition was at an all-time high, the play was sloppy. Gauff tallied 16 double faults and 82 unforced errors. However, she was 9/17 on break points.

Meanwhile, Zheng won points on just 46% of serves and sprayed 74 unforced errors. Worst of all, she was only 10/27 in break-point opportunities.

Gauff did not hold back her feelings after winning the match point. She immediately turned around, thumped her chest, yelling "Let's go!" and "Don't play with me!" —*PTI*

Coco Gauff

I WOULD NOT HAVE LET ROHIT MISS SYDNEY TEST: RAVI

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Had he been the India coach on the previous tour of Australia, Ravi Shastri would not have allowed captain Rohit Sharma to drop himself from the Sydney Test despite loss of form.

Rohit had missed the first Test for personal reasons and did not feature in the last game of the series, taking a "selfless decision" as he could manage only 31 runs in the five innings he played on that 2024-25 tour.

India had lost the Test series 1-3. Shastri said he spoke to Rohit during one of the IPL games this season and let him know how he would have handled the situation in Australia.

"I saw Rohit a lot at the toss. At the toss, you don't get enough time to speak. Though I did put my hand on his shoulder in one of the games. I think it was in Mumbai, and I told him, if I were the coach, you would have never not played that last Test match. You would have played that last Test match because the series wasn't over. —*PTI*

BARCELONA'S 28TH TITLE

Yamal helps Barcelona to beat Espanyol 2-0

LONDON, 16 MAY

A stunning Lamine Yamal strike helped crown Barcelona La Liga champions with a 2-0 win at local rivals Espanyol on Thursday, with victory ensuring Real Madrid cannot catch them at the top of the table. Yamal's effort and Fermin Lopez's goal took Hansi Flick's side seven points clear of Los Blancos with two matches remaining, to clinch Barcelona's 28th title and complete a superb domestic treble. Only the Champions League escaped an exciting young Barca side this season, as they won the league for the second time in six years, at Espanyol's ground again, just as in 2023.

Back then, celebrating Barca players were chased from the field by angry home supporters, but this time, Espanyol turned on the sprinklers to soak the jubilant visitors, who headed down the tunnel quickly.

Yamal opened the scoring after 53 minutes of a tense derby clash with a brilliant curling effort, before Lopez added another in the 95th minute to secure victory.

"It's time to celebrate," said Barca coach Flick, who said he would demand even more from his team next season.

"It's in our DNA (to want to learn), it's normal, and this is what I want from the players, that they always try to get better and they have this hunger, it's crucial."

Outside the stadium before the match, several Espanyol fans were hit by a car that drove into a big crowd, although none were seriously injured, and police said it appeared to be an accident.

Barcelona were seconds away from sealing their title triumph on Wednesday, but Real Madrid snatched a 95th-minute winner against Mallorca to delay the inevitable.

Flick's side started slowly in Cornella, with Espanyol, 16th, looking dangerous on the counter-attack and keen to secure their top-flight survival.

Wojciech Szczesny made a fine save to deny Javi Puado, who broke through on goal in Espanyol's best chance of the opening period. —*PTI*

Barcelona's Spanish forward Lamine Yamal celebrates scoring his team's first goal next to teammate Barcelona's Spanish defender Alex Balde

PHOTO: X / @FCBARCELONA